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Winning Ways; OR, Kitty Atherton's Double Troth.

BY MARGARET BLOUNT,
AUTHOR OF "POOR VALERIA," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

"Methinks there is no lovelier sight on earth
Than gentle woman in her earlier years;
Before one cloud hath gathered o'er her mirth,
Ere her bright eyes grow dim with secret tears;
When life the semblance of a dream doth wear,
And earth is basking in a joyous smile;
When rich delight breathes in the golden air,
And boundless fancies may the heart beguile."
—WILLIS GAYLORD CLARK.

BROKEN Lives are far more common than broken hearts; they may be seen in every direction, if you will but turn your eyes upon the world

you live in. They are simple arrows that have missed their mark—streams that have failed at the fountain-head—fair and smiling gardens that have fallen into barrenness and decay—through whose fault, who can tell? They are lives which ought not to have been lived in vain—lives which ought not to have been full of beauty, of goodness, of holiness—lives which ought to have made and have left other lives better and happier by their example; and yet what a waste they are! And look at those who live them! See how gay, how frank, how winning most of them appear—see how gifted, how beautiful, how graceful they are—how lightly time, and care, and trouble seem to touch them; and yet, to them, how blank, how dreary, how purposeless, everything but death must be! I do not ask the reason of these things. I only know that they are so. And of one such life I am about to write the story. You shall look upon it in its first glad spring—you shall watch it in its glowing summer—you shall gaze tender-

ly on its sad autumnal beauty, and sigh when its hollow winter winds begin to blow. It shall be a true story of a real person who has lived a "broken life"; and at its close, see if you can guess, dear reader, the riddle which so puzzles me. See if you can tell, any more than I can, why a heart so fond and warm should turn to marble—why hopes so pure should fade and die—why a nature so innocent should be forever spoiled—why a spirit so eager and buoyant should be content to fold its pinions and grovel on the earth till the end of earthly things. Recognize thoroughly that aimless, purposeless existence; read its innermost page of failure, of doubt, of self-reproach, and self-distrust. See all the struggle, and all the pain—the consciousness of defeat, and the hopelessness of triumph—the feeble attempt to rise, the desperate headlong fall, and tell me, if you can, what it means! Ah, believe me, those who are so unfortunate as to make life a failure, are not to be harshly judged! We, who are happy, success-



"HUMPH!" HE SAID, AT LAST. "I SUPPOSE I SEE IT ALL. WHAT MAY YOUR ERRAND BE HERE, MR. OLIVER?"

ful, and beloved, can afford to be merciful to them. And when the end comes, and the feet that have to stumble over the world's rough paths are still, and the heart that has so suffered feels no more pain, and the eyes that have looked so wearily through their tears for light and help are closed, may it not be possible that then some "city of refuge" will be opened to the poor bewildered soul, and the great secret of such utter failures be revealed, as the chastening discipline that led it gently there? I hope so; from my inmost heart, I hope so!

An author sat one day in his London lodgings, weary with the din and bustle that reigned in the street below; sick and tired of the "making of books," of which, in his case, at least, there certainly seemed to be "no end;" longing only, like the Psalmist of old, for "wings like a dove," that he might "flee away and be at rest," far from the petty cares and vexations that seem to cluster most thickly around a city home. In this mood he opened a guide-book that lay upon his writing-table, and turning over the leaves at random, chanced upon this passage; an extract from that prose-poet of all country scenery, whose very name (in conjunction with that of his gifted wife) is like a familiar strain of music to the ear—"William Howitt".

"On one side are open knolls and ascending woodlands, covered with majestic beeches, and the village children playing under them; on the other, the most rustic cottages, almost buried in the midst of their orchard trees, and thatched as Hampshire cottages only are, in such projecting abundance, such flowing lines. . . . The bee-hives, in their rustic rows, the little crofts, all belong to a primitive country. . . . As I advanced, heathery hills stretched away on one hand, woods came down closely and thickly on the other, and a winding road beneath the shade of large old trees, conducted me to one of the most retired and peaceful hamlets. It was Minstead. . . . Herds of red deer rose from the fern, and went bounding away, and dashed in the depths of the woods; troops of those gray and long tailed forest horses turned to gaze as I passed down the open glades, and the red squirrels in hundreds scampered away from the ground where they were feeding. . . . Delighted with the true woodland wildness and solemnity of beauty, I roved onward through the wildest woods that came in my way. Awaking as from a dream, I saw far around me one deep shadow, one thick and continuous roof of boughs, and thousands of hoary boles, standing clothed, as it were, with the very spirit of silence."

The author closed the book, and Minstead, with its beech-trees, and green knolls, and red deer and squirrels, and gray forest ponies, rose up before his mental eye like a "city of refuge" in a barren and weary land. At thought of it, the petty vexing troubles that had oppressed him, vanished into thin air, and starting up that instant, lest, at the sight of unfinished "copy" and uncorrected "proofs", his courage should fail him, he went into his bedroom and began to pack his trunk. The next morning, about an hour before that emissary of evil to an author, the "printer's devil", could reasonably be expected at his town lodgings, he was safe in the mail-train for Southampton, rushing away at full speed from him, and from all the tasks and annoyances that follow in his wake. He left the train at one of the small Forest stations, and securing an open carriage and a good-tempered-looking driver, set off in high spirits for Minstead. He had heard of a small inn there, whose quaint name, the "Trusty Servant", seemed to him to harmonize well with the surroundings described by Howitt; and when, at last, he caught sight of the veritable green knolls and beechen-trees (minus the red deer and long-tailed ponies), he pleased himself with a picture of a happy week spent beneath the thatched roof of the hostel—a week of close communion with Nature, in one of her loveliest haunts, among her simplest and most unsophisticated creatures.

But it generally happens that, if people set their hearts upon going to any particular place in the world, and make all their arrangements with a special reference to that place, some malicious sprite interferes suddenly and unexpec-

tedly, and they find themselves located in quite a different direction. This first day in the New Forest was no exception to the ordinary rule. The "Trusty Servant", humble, and out-of-the-way place as it seemed, was full, and the large inn at Stoney Cross was in the same predicament. Night was fast closing in—the driver looked cross, the horse seemed tired—a fine rain began to fall, and the shivering author repented sorely of his hasty trip into a strange territory.

"I might at least have written beforehand to secure lodgings," he grumbled to himself, as they plodded along a dark and dreary forest road.

Suddenly a warm light shone out before them; the driver brightened up visibly, and turned toward him with a broad grin.

"The 'Bell Inn', Brook, sir!" he said, touching his hat. "I thought it were a mile further on;" and he drew up with a great flourish before the door of an old-fashioned inn, standing back from the road, with a large garden at one side, and some very comfortable-looking stables on the other.

A stout, pleasant-faced landlady made her appearance in the passage, the hostler ran round from the stable, and in an incredibly short time horse and driver were resting comfortably from their journey, while the author sat by a cheerful fire in the best parlor, eating his toast, drinking his tea, and reading a London paper, some six weeks old, with much apparent zest.

The place pleased him. It was quiet, neat, and clean, and he determined to make it his head-quarters during his explorations in the Forest. The arrangement was completed before he retired to rest. The next morning he slept late, breakfasted at one (much to the surprise of the round-faced country girl who waited on him), and after spending an hour or two over a book, set out for a long country walk.

It was a mild November afternoon. A gray and cloudy sky hung low above the trees that creaked and groaned with every sudden gust of wind; a heavy mist (changing now and then to angry gusts of rain) was in the air; the ground was wet and sodden, and the smoke from the village chimneys floated suddenly toward the earth. It had been raining all the morning—it would probably rain all the night; and the raw blasts that swept from the east, grew more piercing still as the evening closed in. Few would have cared to be out, either for business or pleasure, at such a time.

Yet the author strolled through the deserted streets of Brook, in spite of the wind, the rain, and the gloomy overhanging sky. He did not seem to fear the storm; he did not face it, but lounged along with his hands in the pockets of his greatcoat, as if he had been strolling through Kensington Gardens on a fine summer's day. In fact, he was scarcely thinking of the weather at that moment. His mind was intent upon the perfect stillness that reigned around him; his spirit, so long vexed and annoyed with a thousand petty troubles brought by each succeeding day, rested gratefully even upon that scene of storm and gloom. He felt old, worn out, and inexplicably weary, it is true—no sense of returning youth, and hope, and joy, came to him upon the wings of that sweeping breeze, but the rain-drops touched his forehead with a cold kiss of peace, and the sullen clouds and the wailing wind seemed to express the thought which he had in his mind all the while.

"The end of all things has come for me, and I am content. But surely it would be very sweet if one could die peacefully and be buried in this little hamlet. I could rest in my grave, I think, if they made it at Minstead!"

As he said the words half aloud, the road took a sudden turn to the left. He turned with it, and came unexpectedly upon a little living picture that made him pause.

Every one knows the truth of the old saying, "the world is full of paper walls"—walls which, by the merest chance, are for ever and fatally separating those who long to meet—walls which are as impregnable as if they were built of the hardest adamant. But it sometimes seems to me that the world is also full of unseen influences, spiritual magnets, which are for ever, and per-

haps as fatally, drawing those toward each other who are far better apart, and yet must meet, because they are fated to do so. Strangely enough do those influences work upon and change our whole lives. Open a door, and you may bring your fate in upon you; cross a street, and it may meet you face to face. The friend you are to cherish, the enemy you are to hate, the man or woman you are to love—somewhere in the wide world they are waiting, and you need not seek them out, for they will surely come to you. They may be dwelling in the far East, you in the distant West—they may be bound to others by the tenderest ties—so may you—and yet, so surely will they cross your path one day, and make their mark upon your life. For my part, so firmly am I convinced of the truth of this theory, that I cannot enter a strange place now without the mental question "What—who will bring it to me?" I never can look upon a new acquaintance without wondering inwardly, "Are the threads of our two lives entwined in any hidden and mysterious way, of which we know nothing as yet?" I do not know that these speculations do any harm; they certainly create in the mind a sort of awe of places, times, and people, which is, perhaps, the most reverent way of looking upon them, and upon life!

In turning the corner of this woodland road, the man of the world had turned a corner in his own life, and he knew it not. Before him, at a little distance, stood the village church upon a gentle eminence; one or two cottages nestled among the surrounding hills, and the whole scene wore that look of green and peaceful repose which is so peculiar a characteristic of all English landscapes.

At his right, another cottage stood modestly by the side of the road. A grove of beech-trees rose behind it; in front was a small garden stocked with old fashioned flowers, and surrounded by a paling half-hidden by the sprays and blossoms of a climbing rose. The little rustic gate was surmounted by a wooden arch, over which woodbine and ivy had been trained by some skillful hand. They garlanded it with a fresh green wreath even yet. The cottage was one of those quaint, old-fashioned thatched and latticed houses you can still see in the New Forest—if in no other part of England—one of those ideal cottages which seem the fit abiding place of James's and Tennyson's "May Queens". At this moment its door stood hospitably open, and in the picturesque little porch a jolly-looking old farmer was talking to two women almost as stout and jolly-looking as himself. At the gate stood a young and handsome man of twenty-five, wearing a farmer's dress, and holding the hand of a girl of seventeen, who looked up in his face with a gay, frank smile. A garden hat hung on her arm. A nosegay of autumnal flowers was in her disengaged hand, and the studied neatness of her simple gray dress and pink ribbons showed that the day was a festive one—at least, in her young eyes.

Pretty eyes she had, too, soft, dark, and bright; a pretty, blooming face, luxuriant hair, a graceful form, an easy carriage; attractions sufficient to stamp her at once as the village belle. And something else was in that face, too, which caught the author's eye and made him fall into a deep reverie as he stood and watched her.

He understood it all that instant, as well as if the story had been told to him by the parties whom it most concerned. There were the father and the aunts, here were the lovers, so happy that they knew nothing of the lowering sky above their heads, or the sudden gust of rain which was even then sweeping up from the west toward them. He stood apart and gazed at them with a smile; but something in their youth, their happiness, their artless confidence in each other, and in life, made him sigh at the same moment.

The voice of the old farmer called the young pair from their pleasant dream.

"Kitty! William! Don't you see it is going to rain? You will not have time for your

walk before tea. In with you before you get a wetting."

Kitty's face was turned toward the road; therefore, as she turned to obey her father's summons, she was "made 'ware" of a tall and elegant stranger, looking very handsome and very sad, who stood just beyond the gate, with his dark eyes fixed upon her as intently as if she had been the fairest vision that ever crossed a poet's path. Kitty started as she caught that earnest gaze—returned it for a moment with a sort of breathless awe—then blushed, and trembled, and turned away with a guilty, frightened feeling at her heart, which she had never known before.

"The gentleman seems tired, and we are going to have a heavy shower," said the farmer, coming down the path toward them; "perhaps he will walk in and take shelter with us till it is over."

The last words were addressed half to William, and half to the author, who, on hearing them, advanced on the instant, and raised his hat.

"You are very kind," he said, in a voice whose tone struck upon Kitty's sensitive ear like some familiar but half-forgotten melody; "and I accept your hospitality as cordially as it is offered—that is, if I am not intruding upon the privacy of a family party."

The old man chuckled, and nodded his head significantly at William.

"No, not a bit on't!" he said, cheerfully. "I'll tell you more about that after tea. But now let us go in. Here come the first drops of the shower."

He hurried up the little gravelled path, followed by William, who had grown suddenly silent and shame-faced in the presence of the unexpected guest. Kitty was silent, too, and never looked his way, although he was walking close beside her. At the porch the flowers she was carrying fell to the ground. The stranger picked them up and gave them to her with a low bow; but not before he had secreted one in the palm of his hand. She saw him do it, and went into the little cottage parlor blushing more deeply than before.

CHAPTER II.

"O Eva, thou the pure in heart,
Why falls thy trembling voice?
A blush is on thy maiden cheek,
And yet thine eyes rejoice.
Thine eyelids droop in tenderness,
New smiles thy lips combine,
For thou dost feel another soul
Is blending into thine."

—ELIZABETH OAKES SMITH.

The fire burned bright upon the cottage hearth, and danced and sparkled over again in the store of cups and dishes that filled the dresser opposite. A row of chairs were drawn up in a cosy semicircle before the hearth, the old farmer installed his guest in the place of honor—the chimney-corner, and sat down by his side. William dropped into a seat near the window, and Kitty and her two female guests hustled about the room, "on hospitable cares intent".

From his nook the stranger watched it all, while he talked with the old man about the traditions of the Forest, and the wonders of "London town". He marked the exquisite neatness of the place, the fresh colors of the pretty carpet that covered the floor, the dazzling brightness of the window-panes, the spotless purity of the cloth the cottage girl was laying. The steel fender almost made his eyes ache with brightness, and look as he might, at the mantelpiece, table, chairs, and shelves, not a particle of dust or dirt could be found on them to offend his fastidious eye. A vase of late-blooming flowers stood on the broad window-shelf. On a little table beneath, lay a Bible and a prayer-book bound in red morocco, a set of "Hervey's Meditations", and one or two volumes of "Sturm's Reflections". The soberly-painted shelves opposite the fireplace held nothing but the modest dishes of delf and earthenware necessary for the farmer's table, but just beyond them, a small book-case hung by its crimson cords, and evidently contained Kitty's literary treasures. At that distance he

could not decipher the titles of the books, but he promised himself a closer scrutiny after tea. Over the book-shelves hung a print of a young girl holding a spaniel in her arms. Upon the wall behind him were two engravings framed in black, and dark with age, representing that dismal "Leaving of the Tuilleries", and that still more dismal leave-taking of a king of France with Marie Antoinette, and her unfortunate children. They were finely drawn and engraved, but it was a relief to look from the agonized group to the fresh young face of Kitty, who was cutting bread and butter just beneath them.

How lovely that face was, now that he could look more closely at it. Dark, silky hair pushed back carelessly yet smoothly from the blooming cheek; eyes that were deep as well as dark, and that were the very "homes of tears". A clear, brunette complexion, with a wild rose tint upon the cheeks, and a deeper crimson on the lips that seemed always ready to break into a smile; a slight aquiline nose, a rounded, dimpled chin, a well-shaped head, that was set proudly on a white and slender throat; a rounded yet delicate form; small hands, feet, and ears—gaze as he might, he could find no fault with little Kitty. More beautiful women he had of course seen—more graceful ones, it may be—but never had so fresh, so natural, and so unaffected a creature crossed his path before. She was as blooming as a sweet wild rose, she was good, and simple, and artless; she moved about her cottage-home with shy, instinctive grace, a little embarrassed by the stranger's presence, a little troubled by the new feelings to which she could give no name, yet busying herself all the while with arrangements for his comfort, in such a charming way, that he could not keep his eyes from her. The words of the ambitious judge in "Maud Muller", that beautiful American poem of John G. Whittier's, came into his mind as he watched her:

"A form more fair, a face more sweet,
Ne'er hath it been my lot to meet.
" And her modest answer and graceful air
Show her wise and good as she is fair.
" Would she were mine, and I, to-day,
Like her, a harvester of hay.
" No doubtful balance of rights and wrongs,
Nor weary lawyers with endless tongues.
" But low of cattle, and song of birds,
And health, and quiet, and loving words."

"Tea is ready, please," said the sweet voice of his "Maud Muller" as he inwardly repeated the last words, and he got up and took his seat at the table by her side. If any one had told him one week before that he would have been sitting sociably at that meal, in company with a young and beautiful girl, an old farmer, and two stout old women, who, however estimable they might be, certainly did not bear the slightest outward resemblance to duchesses, how he would have scoffed the idea! yet, there he sat, helping Kitty with the cups and hot water, as if he had been a tea-maker all his life; eating bread and butter, and cold boiled ham, with the most intense relish, and exerting himself for the entertainment of the company, till old Farmer Atherton and William Hill roared with laughter, and Mrs. Brown, and Mrs. Jones confided to each other behind their tea-cups, that he was "the funniest gentleman they ever did see!". And then when the meal was over, how he insisted on helping them to clear away. I think he would have washed the dishes if Mrs. Brown would have let him! If any one had told these laughing, good-tempered cottagers, "This man who chooses to amuse himself for this moment by a game at 'high jinks' with you is one of the most sarcastic, reserved, and unapproachable of human beings in his own sphere and among his equals"—do you think they would have believed it? You know they would not! And yet it was nothing more than the truth.

The dishes were washed and put tidily away, the hearth brushed, the curtains drawn, the candles lit, and Kitty sat beside her lover in the family circle, while Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Jones took their places near the stranger. The old farmer stirred his glass of spirit, and gazed around the group with contented eyes.

"Quite like as if we had known each other all our lives long—isn't it, sir?"

"Quite. And that reminds me that you ought to know who you have been so very kind to. My name is Francis Oliver. I am an Englishman by birth, and for the present, at least, a Londoner by residence. I came down here for a week's quiet, little thinking I should meet with such pleasant friends, or such a warm welcome."

"You deserve it, sir. You deserve it!" said the old man warmly. "'Tisn't many a gentleman born who would come into a poor man's home and make himself so friendly as you have done to-day. I drink your health, sir; and here's hoping you may find friends and happiness wherever you go."

The author smiled.

"Thank you. Let me return your courtesy, my good friend, and couple with my toast the name of your fair daughter. Long life, a happy home, and some one to love her always." And he bowed to Kitty, and raised his glass to his lips.

"Eh, Kitty, lass, do you hear that?" said the old man, laughing; but at the same time wiping a tear from his eye. "I see you have guessed her little secret, sir; so she will not mind my telling you that your wish for her is likely to be granted. Long life we cannot be sure of; but the happy home she will have, and there is the man who will make it for her." And he laid his hand affectionately on William Hill's shoulder. "'Tis their betrothal day, sir. We have been keeping it with a little dinner, you see."

"I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart," said Mr. Oliver to the expectant bridegroom. "You are a lucky man; and if ever a man's home was happy one, I think yours must surely be, with so good and so pretty a wife within it."

Poor William! It was certainly a misfortune that, at such a moment, he should have been unable to find words for a reply—certainly a misfortune that he should hang down his head, blush furiously, and only mutter something indistinctly, to the effect that he would always be kind to Kitty. Kitty heard it more plainly than any one else, but even as she listened, she glanced from him to the tall, elegant stranger, who was so composed, and so polite, and a sigh stole from her lips. There was a short, awkward silence, broken by a loud exclamation from the farmer, which drew all eyes upon him.

"I wonder I never thought of it before!"

"Thought of what, father?" asked Kitty, moving somewhat uneasily in her chair.

"Why, this gentleman's name! And the book you are so fond of reading."

"Oh!" said Kitty; and her dark eyes grew round, and her mouth opened. "Oh, it is the same name. Did you write it, sir? Is it yours?"

She ran to the book-case, selected a volume bound in green and gold, and put it into Mr. Oliver's hand. He smiled good-naturedly as he glanced at it.

"Yes, it is mine."

"To think of that, now!" said the farmer, proudly. "Many's the time I've heard the child reading it out loud of an evening, and here you are sitting with us, and the book in your own hand. Drat it, how funny things do come round in this world! don't they, sir?" he exclaimed.

"They do, certainly," said the author, who was still holding the book, and gazing absent-mindedly into the fire.

"'Tis a main pretty story, what I remember of it," said the farmer, lighting his pipe. "Have a smoke, sir?"

"Thank you, I never smoke."

"And the people talk there pretty much as they would if they were alive," continued the old man, "which is a real blessing. 'Tisn't often I read a story, but when I do, I like to have things natural—like to have a spade called a spade, you know. Now, it seems to me that the ladies and gentleman that write books, mostly like to call a spade by some finer name. No offence to them, but we plain

people are dreadfully puzzled sometimes to know what they are driving at, they do use such nation fine words."

"The fault of young beginners, mostly," said Mr. Oliver, smiling. "I used to do it myself, when I was a young man. But, now I am getting old and gray, I begin to see the truth of your remark, that a spade should be called a spade, and not a 'utensil for the purposes of gardening', or something of that kind."

"That's exactly what I mean, sir," cried the old man, delighted at finding his criticism so well appreciated. "And now about that book, Mr. Oliver. Was any of it true?"

"A great deal," replied the author. And then he caught Kitty's dark eyes fixed upon him, and, stopping short in what he was about to say, he colored visibly, for, with the egotism peculiar to his profession, he had made his book an exponent of his own soul at that particular period of his life, and there was something in it about a lost love, which was only too true, and which Miss Kitty translated by the light of his momentary confusion precisely as he had not intended her to do. A lost love is a very romantic thing in theory, but no man likes to own that he has been jilted; and Kitty's face showed that she knew the truth too well. Mr. Oliver laid down the book as if it had stung him, and said that he must go.

The clock struck eight as he rose from his chair. They all accompanied him to the gate. The wind and the rain had gone down—the sky looked clear and cold, and a white wintry moon was waiting to light him home.

"It will be fine now," said Mr. Atherton, as he bade him good night. "You were talking about 'Rufus' Stone' a little while ago, sir. By the day after to-morrow the forest will be quite dry enough to cross, and I will show you the way with pleasure, if you would like to go with me."

"I should be delighted," replied Mr. Oliver, glancing toward Kitty, who stood in the background by her lover's side; "but will it not be dull work for us alone? Can we not make up a party—I dare say these ladies would like to go?"

Fancy for a moment, the refined, fastidious Francis Oliver, who would scarcely have picnicked with the Queen of Sheba herself, asking—nay, actually pressing—two fat old farmer's wives, who dropped their h's, and had a thousand provincial peculiarities in their speech, to join in an excursion to Stony Cross, and accept him for their cavalier. He did it, however, and Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Brown were melted by his entreaties, and promised to go. He thanked them warmly; and then, turning to the young farmer, said that of course he and his lovely little friend would join the party. But the day appointed was market-day, and William had to go to Romsey to look after some pigs of a celebrated forest breed. So it was settled that Kitty should go without him, and under her father's care. The author never once looked at her while this arrangement was being made, but stood joking and laughing with Mrs. Brown about the small cart which was to be chartered for the use of herself and her friends. If the donkey gave out, he said he would draw it himself; and after they had visited the Cross, they would light a fire in the forest, and have tea in a regular gipsy fashion. For which purpose he would take certain canisters of potted meats from London in his coat-pocket.

"And we'll bring the tea and sugar," cried the delighted old lady; "and Kitty will see to the bread and butter and such like matters before we start. And, by the way, Brown has some cows in the forest. I wonder if by any chance we could get a peep at them before we come back."

"Oh, by all means let us look up Mr. Brown's cows—you and I will go after them while the others rest after their tea," said the author, holding out his hand with a roguish smile.

"Get along with you, making fun of a woman old enough to be your mother," was a quick reply; but Mrs. Brown shook hands with

him and liked him none the less for his little joke.

It somehow happened that Kitty's good night came last. He did not joke with her—his manner changed entirely as he took her hand, and held it for an instant, while he repeated his congratulations and good wishes for her happy future. Then he lifted his hat, and went strolling away up the moonlit road toward his village lodgings.

They went back to the little parlor, which had a strangely-deserted look since he had gone. Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Jones soon took their leave. William lingered a little while longer, kissed Kitty in the vine-shadowed porch, and then trudged homeward, thinking what a lucky fellow he was, and how little he deserved the happiness which had befallen him. The old farmer read the night-prayers, kissed and blessed his daughter, and went to bed. Kitty saw that the fire was safe, locked the door, and went up the stairs to her own room.

At twelve o'clock that night, as Francis Oliver, tossing and turning restlessly upon his pillow, saw visions of the past by the pale light of the moon that wrung his heart with pangs of "late remorse", little Kitty sat in her chamber re-reading his book by the added knowledge of his looks and spoken words. Beside her on the table lay something at which she looked when she closed the book. She touched it—had the grace to blush deeply—and turning hastily away, undressed, and lay down in her bed. What was it? I am almost ashamed to tell! It was a gentleman's glove of black kid, and Francis Oliver had dropped it in the porch that evening as he was going away.

CHAPTER III.

"I played a soft and doleful air,
I sang an old and moving story;
An old rude song that fitted well
That ruin wild and hoary.
She listened with a flitting blush,
With downcast eyes and modest grace;
For well she knew, I could not choose
But gaze upon her face."

—S. T. COLERIDGE.

"Verily there is no telling what a man may do when he is first falling in love," said Francis Oliver to himself, as he watched, with great amusement, the process of "getting under way" for the Forest excursion, on the day appointed by the farmer. Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Jones had little faith in pedestrian pleasures, and so held to the original plan of a donkey-cart, which he had proposed half in jest to them. And the donkey was obstinate, and would start when he ought to have kept still; and vice versa; and first the bread and butter, and then the ham, and then the tea and sugar, and then the kettles and matches were forgotten; and the two stout ladies created such a commotion as they ran from the cottage to the cart, and from the cart to the cottage again, that all the small boys in the village congregated outside the gate to watch their proceedings, and salute them with a triumphant cheer when the cavalcade was at last set in motion. Mr. Oliver looked on with an inward shudder of disgust; but, when they were fairly off, and little Kitty came tripping down the walk with her pink dress, and her freshly-trimmed straw hat, and the key of the house-door in her hand, his mood changed. He gave her his arm as respectfully as if she had been a duchess, and opening a little gate at the side of the garden, she led him through a green meadow, over a rustic bridge that spanned a laughing brook, past a deserted farm-house, black with age and decay—and they were in the very heart of the Forest.

The author looked round with an exclamation of surprise and delight. The village of Brook was not more than half a mile away, and yet the silence was as perfect as if they had been standing in a Western wilderness. On either side arose groups of majestic oaks, with tiny curls of smoke issuing between their branches, and betokening the presence of human life and human interests, even there. Before them opened the sunniest vistas and the greenest glades, that seemed to lead out of the world into some impossible fairy-land—some paradise that had survived the Fall. As they went

wandering on, new beauties met their eyes at every turn. Now they passed a rustic cottage, half hidden with its flowering vines. Now a bright-eyed child stole out from some winding-path, glanced at them slyly and ran back again; or a drove of small, frolicsome pigs scampered across the footpath, with hilarious squeals and gruntings—or a herd of cows looked at them in sober silence chewing their cuds, or else tossed their tails in the air, and set off in a wild gallop for some inaccessible haunt; and the squirrels chattered, and the wild birds sang, and the swollen brooks murmured far away, till the author's heart grew full with the sense of Nature's loveliness, and that sadness, which such a sense always brings with it, made him turn to his pretty guide with a feeling of yearning tenderness he had never known before.

"Ah, Kitty!" he sighed, "it is almost too fair. It makes me feel so worn-out and gray, dear child, beside you and all this fresh green beauty. I fancy I must be a hundred years old."

Kitty looked up with a smile of wonder. He bent down toward her innocent young face. Cupid only knows what he might have said or done (commend me to the New Forest above all other places in England for turning one's head and brains) had she not exclaimed with a little blush and start:

"O, Mr. Oliver, if you please, we are close to Rufus' Stone, and there are my aunts and father, and the cart!"

If he pleased! At that instant he wished them all ten thousand miles away. However, he put the best possible face on the matter, and joined them at the Stone. The old farmer did the honors of the place with infinite satisfaction.

"Here's where William Rufus was shot, sir," he exclaimed; "and here, where the stone stands, the tree grew from which the arrow glanced. You see the inscription, on three sides of the stone, sir."

Mr. Oliver read it aloud:

"Here stood the oak on which an arrow, shot by Sir Walter Tyrrell at a stag, glanced and struck King William II., surnamed Rufus, in the breast, of which he instantly died, on the 2d of August, A. D., 1100."

"King William II., surnamed Rufus, being slain, as is before related, was laid in a cart belonging to one Purkess, and drawn from hence to Winchester, and was buried in the cathedral church of that city."

"That where an event so memorable had happened might not hereafter be unknown, this stone was set up by John, Lord Delaware, who has seen the tree growing in this place, anno 1745."

"A long time ago—and they are all dead and gone together, now!" was the farmer's comment on the inscription. "They do say, sir, that Purkess's family, at Minstead, have always owned a horse and cart since that time, but have never been rich enough to buy a team. And some gentleman has written a poem about it. Do you remember it, Kitty?"

Kitty repeated, with a trembling little voice:

"And still, so runs our forest creed,
Flourish the pious yeoman's seed,
Even in the self-same spot
One horse and cart, their little store,
Like their forefathers, neither more
Nor less, the children's lot."

"From Mr. Stewart Rose's 'Ballad of the Red King';" said Mr. Oliver, smiling kindly at her. "Thank you, Miss Kitty. And now, when I have succeeded in getting a bit of stone to keep in memory of William Rufus, out of this iron cage at the top, where shall we go?"

Kitty waited till he had attained his object, and then directed his attention to a small thatched cottage, at the end of the glade.

"There is such a pretty dairy farm, there. We always visit it when we come to the Stone."

"Let us go now, then."

They all set off together. The mistress of the farm, a clean-looking old woman of sixty, was paring potatoes in her tiled kitchen, and gladly welcomed them to the humble place.

The author talked with her for more than an hour, and left the house in a more serious mood

than ever. That poor old cottager, with her contented heart and her pious soul, made him feel his own hullessness so deeply. It would have been better for him, perhaps, if, in the course of his life, he had met more people like her.

Tea was ready beneath the oaks when he came out, and Kitty, who had stolen away from him a few moments before, was ready to preside at the sylvan table. The old farmer bowed his head and uttered a reverent grace. Mr. Oliver took his seat beside his particular friend, Mrs. Brown, and the feast began. Not often, though he had sat at rich men's tables where the wine flowed fast and free, had he enjoyed an hour like that.

The afternoon waned slowly—the sun was just sinking goldenly toward the hills, as they finished their simple meal. Kitty ceased to replenish the cups, filled her father's pipe, and looked around her with a little sigh.

All was so still, so sweet, so peaceful in that lovely place. Rufus' Stone could be seen at a distance, between the mossy trunks of the grand old trees—beyond it the Forest stretched far away toward the lonely hills. At her right was the modest dairy cottage, and the cows were coming up the narrow path, lowing gently at the sight of their mistress, who stood at the gate to admit them. A pastoral scene enough, and if it pleased Kitty—whose innocent life had been passed among such green retreats, such quiet nooks—what must it have been to the worn and wearied man who sat beside her? He, too, gazed around and sighed. Then his eyes sought hers, and she almost fancied they were dim with tears.

"Come and show me the little brook I hear singing at a distance," he said, in a low voice.

She arose instantly; and with a slight apology to the others, he led her away.

They walked through the green solitude, arm in arm. The voices of the party they had left were but faintly heard, as they passed down the sunlit glade. In place of them came the singing of birds, the neigh of some startled forest pony with the quick patter of his small hoofs, and the murmuring of a woodland brook. On the banks of that little stream they paused. The arching boughs above them shut out the faint blue sky, but the sunshine still lingered, making its way through branch, and leaf, and thicket, hovering over Kitty's graceful figure, touching with bright rays Kitty's beautiful dark hair. She stood in the mellow light silent and half afraid—her hand resting on the author's arm, her sly eyes glancing everywhere except at him. And he, on his part, bent lower, with a half smile playing around his lips, took that little hand, was just about to speak, when a slight rustle, the breaking of a dry branch, the light tread of an advancing foot, startled them both. They looked up.

Just before them, but on the other side of the brook, stood a lady, wearing a black cloth habit fastened with silver buttons, a Spanish hat, whose black plumes were tipped with silver, and gauntlet gloves embroidered with floss silk of the same hue. She held the skirt of her riding-dress in one hand, the other grasped a little hunting-whip, and she was standing quite still, and looking at the pair with an expression that startled Kitty. She was by no means a handsome woman. She was tall, and slender, and finely formed, it is true, but a certain awkwardness was visible even in her most quiescent attitude. Her face was plain, her features harsh, her complexion but indifferent. She had, however, a pair of beautiful blue eyes—eyes that spoke, that sparkled, that smiled, that wept, that laughed, that danced—changing their expression and their charm with their owner's ever-changing mood. And now they were riveted on Kitty's lovely face with a look that had, possibly, never come into their blue depths before. There they paused—unconscious rivals—the one as lovely as the opening day—the other, lacking many a womanly grace and charm, but possessing, in their stead, the deadliest gift of all, a woman's fascination!

At first sight of the stranger, Mr. Oliver started visibly, changing color. Kitty noticed this, and her heart sank within her with a strange jealous pang, which, she knew quite well, she

had no right to feel. But in the perfect silence that ensued, he had time to collect his thoughts. He took off his hat and bowed deeply.

"Miss Marchmont! This is a most unexpected meeting—need I add, a most agreeable one—to me!"

She turned her eyes on him carelessly, as he leaped across the brook. She let him take her hand, and then she glanced once more at Kitty.

"You saw me in many characters last summer, Mr. Oliver, during our course of private theatricals," she said, with a smile. "How do you like my new appearance, as the Sprite of the New Forest?"

"Say fairy, rather. The orthodox dress for a sprite, I believe, is black and red."

"Court mourning for a certain potentate who shall be nameless. But black and silver will surely never do for a fairy. I must remain a sprite."

"And how did you chance to wander into this out-of-the-way place? You, of all the people in the world! I fully believed you were on the Continent with your friends, the Sestons."

"So I was. But such a fit—or, I should rather say, such a delirium of homesickness seized upon me last week, that I could endure it no longer, and I packed up my belongings and started for England, home, and beauty, once again. And then it was so lonely in that great London house, that I had no sooner reached it than I set out upon my travels, as you see."

"Are you stopping here?" he asked, eagerly.

"At Stoney Cross—but only for a day. I came to pay my respects to Rufus' Stone. I suppose you are here upon the same errand?"

"Yes."

His eye wandered uneasily, as he spoke, toward Kitty, who was still standing where he had left her, gazing down into the running water with a very serious face. Miss Marchmont looked at her, and smiled slightly.

"And, pray, what brought you down here?" she asked, a moment after.

"I cannot tell you, I am sure, why I came. I might say, like Bunyan, that one day 'I fell on sleep', and, waking, I found myself here."

"If you fall on sleep again, I can prophesy a pleasant dream for you. Well, I will neither spoil sport, nor tell tales out of school; only—mind this—Mr. Oliver, you are a man of honor. Remember it—remember to deserve 'the grand old name of gentleman' in all your dealings with that pretty child!"

"What can you be thinking of?" he said, with some warmth. "You may trust me. So may she."

"I am glad to hear it. And, now, adieu for a time. I must go back to my poor pony, who is doubtless wondering what on earth has become of me."

"Where have you left him?"

"In yonder thicket—under the branches of a trusty oak."

"I shall see you safely there, Miss Marchmont."

"Begging your pardon, you will do no such thing. I have a squire in waiting already—both younger and better looking than you."

"Many thanks for the compliment. Who may this knight of the Forest be?"

"I cannot tell. I fancy he is a young farmer. I met him on the high road, and when he found out what very wild ideas I had about the geography of this place, he kindly volunteered to escort me here. I must not keep him waiting; he may be 'County Guy' in disguise, for aught we know."

"Very likely," said Mr. Oliver, biting his lip with a vexed air. "And when do you leave Stoney Cross for London?"

"To-morrow. And you?"

"In a week, or ten days at the latest. May I call in Mayfair when I return?"

"Most certainly. Mind, I am to hear the conclusion of this little forest romance before you put it into your usual three volumes—"

"What do you mean?"

"Ah! you know. I should not like to fall in love with an author, and be dished up afterward for his readers' amusement. However,

your little rustic beauty may not mind; and so, adieu!"

With a musical laugh that grated harshly on his ear, she gathered up her habit and walked away. He stood gazing after her with a peculiar expression on his face, till she disappeared beneath the arching branches of the forest trees, then he drew a long breath—whether it was a sigh of regret or an aspiration of thankfulness he seemed scarcely to know himself.

"I wonder now, whether, and how much I care for that woman?" was his inward comment upon the interview. "She is undeniably ugly, and I love beauty. She is awkward, and I love grace. She domineers over me, and I like a woman to be submissive. She has brains, and in the sex I don't appreciate them. She is the exact opposite in the face, form, character, and soul of my ideal lady-love—and yet, how is it that I feel this queer sense of loss and bereavement whenever she leaves me? She affects me like some old familiar strain of music. She makes me think, remember, and regret. I don't like it—I don't like her; and as for loving—why it would be impossible for me to love a woman with a face like that. It is only some memory of the past and of my happier years that has got mixed up with her idea in my mind. Pshaw! Am I to waste my time pondering over a woman who writes sonnets and talks such nonsensical German trash as Olive Marchmont sometimes does, while a modest little beauty like that is waiting for me—learning to love me, ready at one word from my lips, to come and bless my lonely life?"

He smiled gayly at the thought, crossed the brook, and placing Kitty's hand upon his arm again, led her back to the party, who were just preparing for their return.

Miss Marchmont returned to the place where she had left her horse. It was grazing peacefully beside the stout brown cob which her unknown escort had ridden; but the young farmer himself was leaning against a tree, his arms folded on his breast, and his hat pulled low over his eyes. He looked up as she came near, and something in his face surprised her. It had been a comely, happy face enough when she had looked at it before—comely it was still—but a dreadful pallor overspread it, and pain and trouble that could not be mistaken looked out of those bright blue eyes.

"What is the matter with you?" she asked. "Are you ill?"

"No! I wish I was," was the abrupt reply. "Have they gone?"

"They! Whom do you mean?"

"I saw you talking to him just now. I mean Mr. Oliver, the London writer. Do you know him well?"

A light began to break upon his listener's mind.

"Yes," she said cautiously, "I do know him. I have known him for several years."

"Are you a friend of his?"
She blushed slightly.

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I want some one to speak to him for me. Some one that he will listen to. Some one that can speak very plainly without giving him offence."

"Well, taking it for granted that I am such a person (of which I am by no means sure, mind you), what do you wish me to say?"

"I'm only a plain man—a poor, rough-spoken fellow, dear lady—and perhaps I am taking too great a liberty in troubling you with my affairs."

"Not at all—pray go on."

"Well, this is what I have to say. You saw Kitty Atherton with him just now?"

"That pretty girl? Yes."

"All my life long I have loved her. We played together when we were little children; we have grown up together, and she is my promised wife. Only the other day, in the presence of her father and her aunts, she gave me her promise, and let me put a ring on her finger—and now—and now—she is hanging on his arm, and looking up into his face, and listening to his words, without a thought of me! Mind," he continued, eagerly, "I don't blame

her—not a bit. It is only natural, poor chit, that she should prefer a handsome, clever young man like him to a clown like me. But, O dear lady, he can never love her as I love her! He will never take the pains to make her happy that I would and do take every day of my life."

"I am sure of that," said Miss Marchmont, kindly.

"He is a learned man—a great man—and he would have a thousand things to occupy his mind and take his thoughts away from Kitty, if he married her. And then she would be unhappy. I should have nothing to do, all day long, but to study her comfort and to love her dearly when I was away at my work—nothing to look forward to but her loving kiss and kind welcome when I came home at night. If I was sure of them, dear lady, I should be the happiest man on earth—if I miss them"—his voice trembled, and he passed his hand across his eyes—"if I miss them, I am ruined in every way."

Miss Marchmont looked at him wistfully. Wordly though she was, she had yet a fund of sympathy and pity to spare for a sorrow like this; and her voice was very gentle and soothing as she said:

"I think I know the whole story, now. I heard them speaking of you and your Kitty at Stoney Cross last night. You are William Hill, are you not?"

"I am."

"And Kitty has given her solemn promise to marry you?"

"Only the day before yesterday. Her father and her aunts both heard her."

"And when did Mr. Oliver appear on the scene?"

"That very evening. But I never fancied Kitty liked him till a few moments ago. I saw you talking to him on one side of the brook, while she stood alone on the other. She looked at you, dear lady, as I should look at him. It wrung her heart to see you together almost as much as it wrung mine to watch her. She was jealous of you, and jealousy only comes with love."

"Jealous of me!" said Miss Marchmont, with a scornful smile. "There was little need of that, if she knew all. But, William, you are quite right; if she feels jealousy, she begins, at least, to like him. What am I to do to help you?"

"Ask him to go away—beg him to go away. Tell him all I have said, if you like. You see, it is his writing—his learning—that has won Kitty's heart from me. If he goes now, she may forget him; but if he stays, I know too well what the end of it will be. How can I expect her to give me a look or a word while he is there. And it is nothing but amusement to him, while to me it is a matter of life and death."

He burst into tears as he spoke, and turned away. Miss Marchmont laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"Nay, don't hide them. Don't be ashamed of them. They do you infinite honor, and Kitty ought to be proud of having won such a faithful heart. Take courage, and all will yet be well. I will go home and write a letter to Mr. Oliver that will bring him to his senses. He is a man of honor, and he will leave the Forest at once. Come, put me on my horse, and ten years hence, when I visit you and Kitty, we will come here and have a hearty laugh over the trouble that looks so grievous now."

He assisted her to mount, and placed the reins carefully in her hand, but his face did not brighten at her prediction.

"I wish it may end well; but I have a fear—a heavy fear here—at my heart," he said, sadly.

"Send it to the winds," replied Miss Marchmont, holding out her hand with a smile. "And now good-bye. Believe me, I will do my best in your cause."

"Good-bye, and God bless you for ever, dear lady, and give you your own heart's desire!" he said, as he raised that gracious hand to his lips as gracefully as Francis Oliver could have done.

She tightened her reins suddenly, and galloped toward Stoney Cross. But her eyes were so full of tears that she could scarcely see her way, and her heart was aching. Oh! which of those two could have felt the greatest pain!

"My own heart's desire!" she murmured to herself. "Oh, fool that I am! What but Dead Sea apples, fair to the sight and full of bitter ashes within, can I ever hope to gather from my tree of life? 'Tis a mad world, my masters'—a world that is all at sixes and sevens—all out of joint, all wrong! And what can set it right?"

Ah, Olive Marchmont! only one thought—only one hope—has power to do that. The thought of another world in harmony with itself and with God, and the hope of an entrance, a welcome, and an eternal dwelling-place there!

CHAPTER IV.

"Lady Clara Vere de Vere,
I know you proud to bear your name,
Your pride is yet no mate for mine."

* * * * *
"Nor would I break for your sweet sake,
A heart that dotes on truer charms;
A simple maiden in her flower,
Is worth a hundred coats of arms."

—TENNYSON.

The letter which was to bring Mr. Oliver "to his senses" was duly written that night, and sent to the "Bell Inn" the next morning by the trusty hand of the hostler at Stoney Cross. Mr. Oliver was still asleep. The chambermaid dared not knock at his door till she was summoned by him, so the man returned without an answer. Miss Marchmont sat in her breakfast-parlor awaiting him. When he had told his tale, her face darkened over like a winter sky.

"Tell them to get me a carriage, quick!" she exclaimed; "I wish to get away within ten minutes. Don't stand staring there, but hurry the horses, and tell them to make out the bill."

The man obeyed with a stupid gaze of wonder.

Miss Marchmont's silk dress rustled stormily as she ran up to her chamber, and with her own hands gathered together her "belongings", and crammed them into the small trunk she had brought with her. Generally speaking, she was a most orderly person; tidiness with her was nearly a disease, and the sight of a crowded drawer or a toilet-table, whose appurtenances were not laid down by plummet and rule, almost made her ill. But now she scarcely seemed to know or care what she was doing. Her riding-habit, spurs, boots, and whip were crammed into the box close beside black moire antiques, lutestrings, and velvet jackets; the diamond studs she sometimes wore, found a place in her box of pens; her Maltese lace collars and chemisettes were rolled up like a bundle of rags, and stuffed into a vacant corner, and she herself seemed perfectly unconscious all the while of the wild confusion she was making. Forcing down the lid of the trunk, she locked it, and rang for a servant to carry it away; then, putting on her hat and cloak, she snatched up her gloves and returned to the parlor. In ten minutes more she had settled the bill, bidden her landlady good-bye, and was riding away toward Lyndhurst Station as fast as the pony-chaise could carry her. What could she have expected, what had she failed to find, that she was thrown into such a fever of impatient excitement?

That morning she fancied she had made a fool of herself. She had written, according to promise, to Mr. Oliver, mentioning her adventure with "County Guy", and begging him, if his own heart was not engaged in the pursuit of the rustic beauty, to relinquish it in the young farmer's favor. It was an awkward task for her to undertake, and she had made the matter worse, by an allusion to herself, which she fancied it must be impossible for him to mistake. What madness dictated the words she could not tell—but they had been written and would be read—and they amounted to no less than a tacit confession of her preference for him. Had that message found him awake—had he translated it rightly, and believed in the truth of his

own translation, how much suffering might have been spared them both!

As it was, her face burned with blushes during her rapid ride, although she was alone. She had forfeited her own self-respect, and that was bitter—she had richly earned his contempt, and that was more bitter still. Restless, irritable, wild with the pangs of wounded love and wounded pride, she chafed over her mistake like a caged lioness, and scarcely drew a free breath till she was safe that night in her London home. There, with the letters that had arrived during her absence, the housekeeper's report, and the proofs of her book, which was just passing through the press, she managed to forget for a time what she had done.

The letter which had disturbed her so deeply was given to Mr. Oliver at the breakfast-table, by the rosy-cheeked servant who waited on him. He was busy with the morning paper when she laid it down, and not till he had glanced through all the columns, and duly digested the leading articles, did he break its seal.

A vivid color suffused his face as he saw the firm, clear writing, and the signature upon the last page. He read the first words with an impatient pshaw! Actually smiled over the description of William Hill's troubles, and murmured to himself that it was a bit of Miss Marchmont's "pathetic line of business"; but came at last upon a passage that made him pause and look more serious:

"You have many acquaintances in London who are certainly able to interest and amuse you, if you cannot interest and amuse yourself; you have, in me, an earnest and sincere friend, whose home is always open to receive you, whose heart is always ready to give you sympathy and kindness, if you claim it. Our pursuits, our interests, and our tastes are the same—we have, I hope, the same professional end in view—we can help each other, counsel each other, guide each other, do each other good. Can you not, then, for the sake of such a friendship, renounce a fleeting fancy—go back to your pleasant author life, and make this poor man happy in the home and in the way he is longing for?"

There was little else in the letter to attract his attention; he hurried it through, and then returned to those sentences which might mean so much or so little—those sentences which poor Olive, driving through the Forest at that moment on her way to town, would have given worlds never to have written.

"A friend whose home is always open to me whose heart is always ready to give me sympathy and kindness," he mused. "Why, a wife could do no more! 'If I claim it!' Is that a challenge—a hint—a mental beckoning with her fairy hand, I wonder? It would not be a bad thing for me. She has a fortune, a house in town, good horses, she gives capital dinners, and one is sure to meet in her rooms all the celebrities of the day. She is a clever authoress, and will be a famous one yet; and I think she cares for me! On the other hand, to counterbalance all this, she is not pretty; her best friends could not tell her that! She is not graceful, she is not accomplished, she will dress herself eternally in black, and she has none of those little, womanly ways and weaknesses which I admire; she is too independent, too capable of taking care of herself. Nothing of the vine about her—she will grow on her own ground, or not at all!"

He spread out her note before him, and smiled over it.

"Look at that waste of ink and energy! She writes as if she were making a charge with cavalry. I wonder the pen does not go through the paper. How different from Kitty's little pot-hooks and hangers. Dear child—she spelt 'affectionate' with one 'f' last night and yet I could not find it in my heart to tell her of the blunder."

He glanced kindly at the little blue and gold edition of "Moore's Poems" which Kitty had given him at his urgent request, just before he had left her on the previous evening. He turned to the title-page and read again:

FRANCIS OLIVER, Esq.,
With the affectionate regards
of
his little friend,
KITTY ATHERTON.

Side by side they were lying—the girl's uncertain scrawl, the woman's firm, decided hand-

writing. And Mr. Oliver was looking first at one and then at the other, with a puzzled, undecided face that was good to see.

"Like the famous ass between two bundles of hay!" he said at last, with a scornful smile, "I cannot tell which I love. Is it Kitty, with her sweet young face, and artless ways; or is it Miss Marchmont, the friend who is ready to give me sympathy and kindness when I claim it? She shall decide. I will go and ask her this very morning, before she returns to London; and if she accepts me, Kitty, my pretty Kitty, I must even give you back to William Hill!"

He rang the bell, and having made a careful toilet, mounted the young landlord's brown cob, which was always at his service, and rode away toward Stoney Cross. The broad highway was before him, but he chose to take the Forest Road, and passing by the cottage where Kitty was busy at work, lifted his hat to her, and bent almost to his saddle-bow as he galloped by. The silly little thing ran straightway up to her chamber, all blushing and trembling, and from the latticed window watched him till he was out of sight. The small simpleton actually thought that he had ridden by for the express purpose of seeing her; and a vision of a galloping steed, and a handsome, stately rider, filled her head all the morning, to the sad detriment of the farmer's noonday meal. Alas! poor Kitty! you are, by no means, the first of your sex whom circumstances and a man have made an utter fool.

The brown cob galloped steadily on. Beside the Forest brook, its rider drew rein for a few moments, and sat lost in a reverie, with his eyes fixed upon the bank where Olive Marchmont had stood on the previous afternoon. The old strange sense of loss and bereavement came over him, and he felt that he was right, as he rode on toward her temporary home, to ask the question which should forever unite or forever separate their two destinies.

Ah! how comically sad, how ludicrously pathetic are these crosses in life! Here was the knight, ready and eager to pay his vows at the lady's shrine; and the lady herself, frightened, and ashamed, and repentant at the unsought encouragements she had already given, was flying the country at the rate of twenty miles an hour, little dreaming that the words she would have given her ears to hear, were trembling on the tip of her lover's tongue. I could find it in my heart to laugh at Mr. Oliver, as he sits there, mute and grave, listening to the bar-maid's story of how "the lady flewed up-stairs all of a sudden, packed up her things her own self, and was off in a jiffy, leaving them all in a frustration, like."

"That will do, thank you," said Mr. Oliver, at last; and putting a piece of silver in her hand, he rode away again. Where? He scarcely knew or cared at that moment; but the brown cob, like a wise beastie, struck into the road that led toward home.

CHAPTER V.

"Take this kiss upon the brow,
And in parting from you now,
Thus much let me avow:
You are not wrong, who deem
That my days have been a dream;
Yet if hope has flown away
In a night, or in a day,
In a vision, or in none,
Is it, therefore, the less gone?
All that we see or seem
Is but a dream within a dream."

—EDGAR A. POE.

"Duped—foiled—laughed at once again!" was Mr. Oliver's mental comment on the tale he had heard at Stoney Cross, "It was a trap, of course, set for me by Miss Marchmont—a trap for my vanity, and I was too blind to see it. How she will laugh when she hears how eagerly I caught at the bait! By Jove! I can't bear that. I must show her that I am not the idiot she takes me to be. And there is but one way of doing that. I must marry; I must take no flirting city belle to make a further laughing-stock of her literary husband. I must have some one who will love me dearly—who will give me the first freshness of an untried life—an untried heart. I should be madder than

a March hare if I looked for such a thing in London: the search would be as hopeless as that of Diogenes with his lantern. But Kitty—God bless her!—Kitty can give me all I ask; and she shall. And so, Miss Marchmont, adieu!"

He waved his hand, as if in farewell, and burst into the refrain:

"He turned him right and round about,
Upon the Irish shore,
With adieu forevermore, my love
Adieu forevermore."

but it died upon his lips, and he rode toward the cottage in a silent mood.

Kitty was watching again at the open window. There is something passing sweet in being watched and waited for; and how her face brightened as she saw him ride up to the gate! She was down before he had time to dismount, gazing at him with eyes that spoke the sweetest flattery. Dinner was just over, and she had dressed herself for the afternoon in her pretty pink print, with a clean collar, and a rose in her dark hair. Mr. Oliver looked at her wistfully. Her artless welcome, her unaffected joy, her undisguised admiration, fell like soothing balm upon his wounded pride—his aching heart.

"Kitty," he said, "may I come in for a little while? I feel tired, and lonely, and ill."

The bright face softened.

"Oh yes—if you please. Aunt Sarah is here; but you won't mind her?"

"Not at all. Can we send the horse back to the inn?"

"Father will take it when he goes to his work. Pray, come in, sir."

He obeyed. Mrs. Brown greeted him warmly—so did the old farmer. His horse was led away, and he himself was established near the window, in the arm-chair, with a pillow smoothed by Kitty's hands behind his aching head, and her tiny flask of hartshorn in his hand. Now and then he closed his eyes, and the little forest brook, and the tall figure of Miss Marchmont rose before him. He opened them, and lo! the little garden outside, with its late blooming flowers, and small holly tree; and, within, the cheerful fire, the tidy room, the anxious, kindly faces—all for him. Kitty's soft voice in his ear—Kitty's little hands bathing his throbbing temples—Kitty's dark eyes fixed upon him with such watchful love. Ah! Miss Marchmont! are you already forgotten? and was the wound you gave a mere pin-prick to vanity, not a deadly stab at the beating heart?

It would seem so; for the afternoon passed away, and yet he made no attempt to go. He shared their evening-meal, and sat talking with the old farmer afterward, as quietly as if he had been one of the usual family-circle. Kitty listened, speaking seldom, but looking very happy. But when Mrs. Brown went away to her own home, and Mr. Oliver drew his chair a little nearer to Kitty's, and began to talk to her, another visitor made his appearance, who startled them both unaccountably. Why? It was only William Hill, and Mr. Oliver was asking a simple question about the sewing of a seam—nothing more—nothing that need have made them both blush so furiously.

They did blush, however, and William Hill saw it distinctly. The young men greeted each other coldly. Some wild idea of out-staying the new-comer seemed for a time to possess Mr. Oliver's mind, but he thought better of it at last, and took up his hat to go. The farmer accompanied him to the gate, and as he stood watching outside for a few moments after the old man had said good-night, he had the felicity of seeing two shadows upon the white blind—two shadows, and so very close together! A sharp pang of jealousy came and went—then he laughed bitterly at his own folly.

"She is as good as his wife—what right have I to come between them? I will go back to London to-morrow," he said to himself; and, pulling his hat over his eyes, he set off at a rapid pace for the inn.

The group he left behind did little to entertain each other. The farmer smoked his pipe, Kitty sewed, and William turned over the leaves of the book that lay on the table by her

side. It was a newly-published novel, and he glanced at a sentence here and there, scarcely understanding what the words could mean, till turning to the title-page, he dropped the volume as if it had burned his fingers. Kitty sewed more industriously than ever, without looking up. No need for her to glance at that now-familiar name, "Francis Oliver". Was not every letter, every graceful curve and flourish the wayward pen had made in inscribing it, stamped upon her brain—nay, upon her heart itself?

At that moment the clock struck nine, and the farmer knocked the ashes from his pipe, and bade the lovers good night. William sat in silence till he heard the chamber door close behind him, then laid his hand upon Kitty's sewing. She looked up, and let him take it away without a word. She saw in his eyes that the dreaded time for explanation had come.

"Sit here by me," he said, drawing the farmer's chair close beside his own.

She obeyed, and, leaning back, covered her eyes with her hand. She felt so guilty at that moment that she could have sunk into the very depths of the earth only to be out of William's sight. If, for a moment, he had cherished any secret hope that he might have been mistaken in his thoughts about Kitty and the author, I think it must have vanished then and there, as he looked upon that hidden face, that shrinking, trembling form. It was some time before he spoke again; but when he did so, his voice was very kind.

"Kitty, dear, don't be frightened. I am not going to scold or blame you. I only want to talk to you seriously for a few moments, if you will let me. May I?"

"Yes," sighed Kitty.

"Take away your hands, then—let me look at you. What can you be afraid of, my love? Don't you know I would rather die this moment than give you pain?"

"Oh, that is it!—that is it!" cried Kitty in a choked voice. "You are so kind—too kind—and I—I am a wretch!"

It was a tacit confession of her inconstancy—he felt it so—and, from that moment, neither attempted to hide it or disguise it any more.

"No; don't say that love. You are my own good little Kitty now, as you have ever been. But you have made a mistake about me, have you not? You thought you loved me when—you promised to be my wife—" The brave fellow's voice faltered a little, and he could not go on.

But Kitty, forgetting him for a moment, and only eager to excuse her own apparently-inexcusable conduct, started up, took his passive hand, and cried out, blushing: "Oh, indeed I did, William, or I would never have promised, I always thought I loved you—till—"

"Till Mr. Oliver came!" he said, finishing the sentence for her.

She hung her head, and touched his hand humbly with her lips.

"O William, forgive me. I could not help it, though I tried. He was so clever—so good—so different from any one I had ever seen before."

"He was—and he is!" replied the young man, with bitter emphasis. "And he is handsome and rich into the bargain. He can give you a splendid home, and a name that every one knows. I have nothing to offer you but a poor cottage, these strong hands, this honest heart! Kitty—I don't blame you for choosing him instead of me."

"Oh, how you wrong me!" she exclaimed, with sudden energy. "It is not the home and the name I care for; it is himself! At first, it was his writings I admired; but now, if he were a beggar in rags, I would go with him, if he asked me, work, beg, and die with him, if need be, because he is so dear—so dear to me, that I cannot find words to say what I feel!"

She stopped short, for William turned so pale that she could not but remember where she was, and to whom and of whom she was speaking.

"You say this to me!"—he murmured—"to me! And I was to have been your husband in three months more. O Kitty, it is hard!"

She could not but be moved by the sight of his sufferings.

"Forgive me," she said gently. "I ought not to have said it; but the words came, and I could not stop them."

"No doubt—no doubt. Never mind me, Kitty, I can bear it. And I may as well know the worst. When a man has got his death-blow, a stab or two more or less makes little difference to him. Now, tell me all. Talk to me as if I was your own brother. Has this man asked you to marry him?"

"No!"

"He has some honor then about him. He knew you were engaged to me, and he has respected us both so far, for which I thank him. But when he knows that you are free, as he will know to-morrow, Kitty, he will ask you to marry him. If I was not sure of that, I would not let you go. What answer shall you give?"

Was there any need to ask that question? One look at her downcast eyes should have been enough. Nay, it was enough, and he went on with a patient sigh, that never reached her ear.

"I would not say one word, Kitty, to make you unhappy; but I do think that when he asks you that question, you ought to ask him another: about that lady from London who was here the other day. Do you remember?"

Kitty colored brightly. Had she not wasted many an hour since that sunny afternoon, in vain conjectures about the stranger, who, although she was not gifted with beauty or grace, had yet managed to take Mr. Oliver from her, and make him utterly oblivious of her presence, for a full quarter of an hour? That lady who had known him before she herself had, but of whom he said so little—that lady who stood suddenly beside the Forest brook, as if she had dropped from the clouds, and who looked at her with so much meaning in her eyes! And William could ask if she remembered her!

"What of her! What do you know of her? What is she to Mr. Oliver? What is Mr. Oliver to her?" she cried out, eagerly.

"Those are questions which Mr. Oliver must answer," was the grave reply. "I know nothing more of the lady than this, that she was good and kind to me, when I needed goodness and kindness most; and that it struck me then, through all my trouble, that she was fond of Mr. Oliver. I don't know if I was mistaken or not. People ought not to marry without the fullest mutual understanding on such points as these."

Kitty sighed, and said she thought so too; but all the while her heart was very sore at the thought that Miss Marchmont, or Miss Anybodyelse, could ever, at any period of his former life, have been more to Francis Oliver than she was now. If he could have come to her as she came to him, loving for the first time, with pure lips and a fresh heart, how much dearer he would have been! She did not put that feeling into words. She might have denied its existence if any one else had done so, but it was there all the same,

William, who had been watching her changing face for some time in silence, now rose to go.

"It is getting late, Kitty; the clock will soon strike ten. I have much to do before I sleep. I am going away to-morrow."

"Going? Where?"

"To London."

"So suddenly. And because of this—because of me?"

"Even so, Kitty. Do you quite understand what this visit means? Do you see that I am leaving you to-night, as free as it is possible for a woman to be? Do you know that I shall never look upon your face again for many a year—never see you, perhaps, till you have your children at your knee? It is true, Kitty; and feeling all that I do feel, do you think I could stay here, and see it all brought about? Oh, no! I love you so well, that if I am in the way of your happiness, I can stand aside and let mine go; but it must be away from here—away from the old home—away from you. And so I am going to my father's brother in London, and he will send me abroad to America."

He has land there that ought to be looked after. I am fit to do that, if nothing more. So God bless you, my dear, and make you happy in your own way. You will think, sometimes, of your old playfellow, won't you, Kitty—of the poor fellow who loved you—"

He broke down at last, and leaning his head upon her shoulder, cried like a child. Her tender little heart could not bear it. She said between her own sobs, that he should not go; and that she would try to love him once again, and be a good wife to him if he would but take her back. That promise roused him—made a man of him once more!

"You are an angel—a tender, pitying angel," he said, as he took both her hands in his, and looked down into her pale little face. "I shall take the memory of your kindness with me wherever I may go, but you shall not give up your own heart's desire for me. No, Kitty; marry him, if he is so dear, and may his wish about you come true—'a long life, a happy home, and some one there to love you always'. Now, God bless you, my dear; you will let me kiss you for the last time. Good-bye, Kitty. Good-bye!"

He touched her forehead lightly with his lips, and was gone. She thought she heard him sob as he closed the door. She herself sat down and cried as if her heart would break. The fire died out—the candle flickered and burned low—she shivered all over when she went upstairs to bed. Poor little Kitty! It was the first time she had ever grieved or pained any one in her short life; and to grieve William was the worst of all. Her earliest playmate, her kindest friend, the child's sweetheart, the girl's protector, the maiden's lover—oh, it was unpardonable! She wept herself to sleep with the bitterest tears those sweet dark eyes had ever known.

CHAPTER VI.

"I stand amid the roar
Of a surf-tormented shore,
And I hold within my hand
Grains of the golden sand.
How few! Yet how they creep
Through my fingers to the deep,
While I weep—while I weep!
O God! can I not grasp
Them with a tighter clasp?
O God! can I not save
One from the pitiless wave?
Is all we see or seem
But a dream within a dream?"

—EDGAR A. POE.

At three o'clock the next morning, William Hill came out of his own little cottage, and closing the door carefully behind him, in order that he might not disturb his still-sleeping housekeeper, set off down the road in the direction of Kitty's home. His preparations for the journey had all been made, his luggage was to follow him to London, and he himself was to walk over to Lyndhurst to breakfast and catch the early express train. He had said good-bye to his housekeeper, his favorite hound, and nut-brown horse, before he slept. There remained but one last farewell, and then he was free!

The church clock struck the half-hour, as he came in sight of Kitty's home. Serene, in a lightly-clouded sky, shone the yellow moon; her light falling with the softest beams (it seemed to him) around the hallowed spot where his love was sleeping. He paused beside the old wooden stile, where Kitty had so often lingered on summer evenings, long gone by, to listen to his loving sketches of their future home; he leaned against her favorite seat and looked up at her latticed window with a bitter groan. His simple soul was bewildered by the blow that had fallen so suddenly—his loyal loving heart could scarcely comprehend how such a thing could be. The most beautiful, the most intellectual woman on earth cou'd never have tempted him from his allegiar Venus and Minerva together would have eclipsed, in his eyes, by little Kitty. How differently she must have felt for him all the while, since the first word, the first look of this hated stranger had drawn her heart away!

Poor William! It was indeed a bitter draught to drink. Jealousy is as cruel as the grave, and when it is well founded—when your rival is

handsomer, cleverer, richer, and more agreeable than you—when, compared with him or her, you are mentally, morally, and physically a dwarf, a pygmy—it does not by any means take from the weight of your burden, or add to your capacity for bearing it. The feeling has its rise only in selfishness and wounded pride—we all know that; but while selfishness and pride are born with us, and remain with us till we die, I do not see how we are to escape these pangs, except by loving no one very deeply. The saints of olden times, who came as near perfection as poor human nature can ever hope to come, may have laid aside their self-will and self-love so entirely as positively to rejoice in slights and humiliations; but I question much, if, in this nineteenth century, any heart can be found that (however much all outward manifestation of feeling may be hidden) will, in a case like this, draw back with honest meekness, and own that another is worthier of the prize. Conscious, it may be, of that other's worth, and its own imperfections all the while, yet inwardly pained and wronged, and deeply resentful when the beloved object grows conscious, too! Ah, no; whatever we may be to the world and to ourselves, we all want to be first and foremost in the estimation of the one! We all echo Montrose's egotistical song,

"As Alexander I will reign,
And I will reign alone,
My thoughts did evermore disdain
A rival on the throne."

It is selfish, it is wrong, it is laughable, perhaps, but also it is very natural. Just one little kingdom—one little world, where we may reign, and "bear, like the Turk, no brother near the throne". This is the common desire and the common right of every son and daughter of Adam. But people do not always find their desires granted, or their rights maintained in this world, as we learn to our cost. When we find that the kingdom has revolted or been stolen treacherously away—when we see the "conquering hero" marching in with banners flying, drums beating, trumpets sounding, to take possession of his loyal province, while we, who once owned or thought we owned it, are fain to creep through the victorious procession, and hide ourselves in shame and grief beyond its walls—is it strange, after all, that the tumult of our thoughts points rather to angry revenge than to meek submission?

I think not, and remembering certain pangs which I myself underwent in my younger and more impressionable days, I feel inclined to sympathize with this poor young farmer, when understanding but vaguely yet resenting keenly those qualities in his rival which had won Kitty's heart, all his pain, and agony, and fever of wounded love and pride culminated in unmitigated wrath against Francis Oliver, the man who, with so many gifts, so many blessings, so many to love him, had come there to steal the one little ewe-lamb, the poor man's sole possession. In no spirit of profanity did he make the comparison. He had never read that passage without an involuntary thought of her, and now she was for ever lost to him. He could not hate her, he could not wish harm to her; but woe to the man who had crossed his path, if by any chance they met! And then glancing once more toward the modest little chamber, he laid his head upon the stile, and burst into tears.

So it went on—the old story—the old grief, which everyone knows by experience, better than words can tell it! First tears, then anger, then wild reproaches, then tears again—frantic and useless strivings against what was, and what was to be, while the "still moon looked calmly on his pain"! The clock struck four. He turned for a moment before he left the stile to gaze over the fair expanse of country on which the moon smiled down. He never saw it again, save in some passing day-dream, but every little hill and undulating valley, every tree, and brook, and flower, and, most of all, that rustic cottage with its latticed windows and vine-wreathed porch, was stamped ineffaceably on his brain. And many a time, years afterward, in his western home, that quiet moonlight shone, and the English village and the church

upon the hill rose up vividly before him, and he ~~kened~~ at the memory, and prayed in vain for rest and peace from its haunting presence. For his was one of those unfortunate natures that can never forget—one of those unfortunate hearts that can never change!

A week later, he sailed for America. And little Kitty, without knowing it, had lost the kindest, bravest, and truest heart that ever beat or broke for her sweet sake.

Did Kitty care?

I scarcely know how to answer the question. Women's hearts are not always as hard as nether millstones, and it was impossible that she should not feel some regret for the pain she had inflicted on one, whose worst fault was loving her too well. But, after the first bitter tears had been shed, and the first feeling of loneliness overcome, I am afraid that her spirit danced joyously in the sunlight of liberty—that her whole nature thrilled with ecstasy to know that she was free! It seemed cruel and wicked to rise the morning after that sad parting, with such a spring of life and happiness within her breast—it seemed unkind to rejoice in the beauty of the opening day, the singing of the birds, the familiar village sounds, when poor William was so many miles away; yet she could not help it; and the farmer, coming home to breakfast, found her "lilting" merrily as she made the tea, about the lassie who "ca'd the yowes to the knowes" in company with her shepherd swain.

The old man sat down to his simple meal with a roguish smile.

"You seem very happy, Kitty," he remarked. "I thought how it would be when I heard William go away so late last night. Have you said your last words as lovers, and is the day fixed for next week instead of three months hence, that you have turned canary after such a fashion?"

Kitty turned red and white as he looked at her, and then the truth came out.

"Father, we had our last words as lovers; that is very true. But we have not named another day, and William has gone."

"Gone?" said the farmer, draining his cup, and helping himself to another slice of bread and butter. "Give me some more tea, child. Where has he gone to?"

"To America!"

"What?"

His sudden start frightened her so that she dropped the tea-pot, and scalded her hand terribly.

"Now, see what you have done, you silly little puss. It serves you right for trying to play tricks on your poor old father. Does it smart badly? Run and get some cotton-wool, and wrap it up. I can make the tea myself."

"Oh!" burst out Kitty, "I don't mind the hand, father. I deserve to be scalded worse than that! I am a wicked, ungrateful girl, and when you hear all, I do believe you will turn me out of the house!"

"Bless me, child! what are you talking about? One would think you had gone mad!" he exclaimed, pushing back his chair, and looking intently at her. For the first time he noticed her paleness, her restless air, her tear-stained eyes, and a suspicion of the truth seemed to flash over his mind as he gazed.

"Heyday, miss!" he exclaimed, sharply. "What is all this about? You have been doing something wrong. What is it? Out with it!"

Never before had he spoken to her in such a tone, and the poor child was frightened half out of her wits, and could only gasp piteously: "William! Don't be angry father—don't scold me!"

"William! what has he to do with it? Now, don't tell me you have been giving him a heart-ache, or I shall be tempted to box your ears. Have you quarreled?"

"Worse than that, father!" she said desperately, bursting into tears as she spoke.

"Worse!"

The old man turned pale.

"Kitty, you didn't—you couldn't mean, that he has really gone?"

"To America! Oh dear! Yes, father!"

"And you have driven him away, miss? Oh, I see it all now! Give me my hat and stick."

"What are you going to do, father? William is many a mile away by this time."

"More shame to you, that you have to tell me so! But I'm not going after William. Poor fellow! I love him like my own son, but he is far too good for a silly, flirting little thing like you, and I hope he will marry out in America, and never think of you again. No, I won't ask him to come back to a girl who has used him so; but I'll do something else." And he put on his hat, grasped his stick, and whistled to his dog in a very significant way.

"Father! O father! where are you going?" cried Kitty, getting between him and the door, in an agony of fear.

"I am going to see the man who has made all this mischief. Yes; you may well blush and hang down your head. You know, as well as I, that you were willing enough to marry William till this popinjay of a London writer came down here and turned your foolish brain. A coxcomb, who will never think of you twice, after he gets back among his town friends; and yet you have gone and broken a good man's heart for his sake! However, I'll have none of his philandering here. Now that he has gained his end, he shall just take himself back to the city again, or I will know the reason of his staying. Open the door."

"Father dear, what will Mr. Oliver think, if you go to him like this?"

"I don't care what he thinks."

"Oh, yes you do—you care what he thinks of your poor little Kitty! If you go to him on such an errand, he will say to himself that you are trying to frighten him into marrying me. You know he will. And then he will despise me, and I shall die."

"Nonsense, child! I tell you I won't have him come here any more to fill your head with nonsense. If I had not been as blind as an old beetle, I should have seen it all from the first. Yet, who on earth could have expected a young woman, with a sweetheart of her own, to go and fall in love with a perfect stranger, in a week's time. I'm ashamed of you Kitty; that is a fact."

"I know I have done wrong, very wrong, but, oh! father, don't go to him. I could not bear that! I think it would really kill me—indeed I feel as if I was dying now!"

As she spoke, she turned very pale; her eyes closed, and she would have fallen to the ground if he had not caught her in his arms. Overwhelmed with contrition for his harshness, he placed her in a chair, and held a glass of water to her lips, promising all and everything she asked, if she would but look at him—smile on him once again.

Kitty heard the frantic words as she recovered from that death-like swoon; took the advantage which her illness gave her, and never let it go.

"I am better now," she said, putting the water away. "You spoke so loud and looked so angry, that made me faint. But you have promised, father—remember that."

"Yes, child, I will remember. Are you sure you are better?"

"Quite sure. And you will not say anything to Mr. Oliver, even if he happens to come here?"

"No—at least—Kitty, you must promise me that you will not let this man make love to you."

"He never does, father."

And the color came stealing back into her cheek again, like the tint of a young moss-rose.

"And you must only see him when your aunt is with you."

"Very well, father."

There was a short silence. The old man looked perplexed and puzzled.

"Child, I wish your mother had lived," he said, at last, laying his hand fondly on her dark hair. "You are growing very like her; you are far too pretty to be left alone; and I do not know how to guide you as she would. Remember your mother, and your mother's God, my dear; that is the best advice I can give you. And don't break my heart, Kitty, in my old age; don't let me have to meet her in heaven,

and tell her that her only child—her darling child—has done anything wrong!"

His voice trembled, his eyes were filled with tears, and he snatched up his hat, and left the house without another word. Kitty sat watching him as he went down the narrow garden-path; and then her thoughts turned, with fond relief, toward the beloved one, who, through her intercession, was safe from all blame and rebuke. What did it matter how much she might have to bear, so he was unmolested—what were all the unkind words and bitter reproaches, so they did not fall upon his ear!

She went about her daily work, no longer singing, it is true, but with a heart that was once more at ease. The momentary strain of suspense was over; the worst was known and—what was more—forgiven! She was free to act for herself—free to be happy, if she could and in her own way. And even Aunt Betsy, coming in later in the day, with words of wondering condolence, and the news of William Hill's departure, found herself checked and silenced, she scarcely knew how, by something in Kitty's face, and voice, and manner, that she had never seen before.

The news traveled fast, as news of that description always must; and long before night-fall, every one was aware that the lovers had quarelled and parted, and that "the gentleman from Lon'on" was at the bottom of it all. "The gentleman" heard it also, by chance, from a lounging in the tap-room, and the rustic publicity annoyed him to such an extent, that he ordered a fly, packed up his valise, and made as hurried a retreat from the Forest as Miss Marchmont had done a few days before. To stay and be talked over by those small farmers and the village girls—oh, it was intolerable! And that night he slept at Lyndhurst, in the best bedroom of an inn famous for its hunting dinners in the sporting days of old; but now fast falling into loneliness and decay. Kitty knew nothing of this, when, after the day's work was at an end, she strolled out through the little side gate and into the Forest Road. She walked there for an hour, as the sun was going down; her face growing sadder, her eyes more wistful in their glances as every moment fleeted by. She had half fancied she should come upon Mr. Oliver, walking or riding in his favorite haunts. The poor child had so much to say to him!

CHAPTER VII.

"But when I saw that gentle eye,
Oh! something seemed to tell me then,
That I was yet too young to die,
And hope and bliss might bloom again!

"With every beamy smile that cross'd
Your kindling cheek, you lighted home
Some feeling which my heart had lost,
And peace which long had learned to roam."

—MOORE.

Poor Kitty waited that evening by the Forest road, in vain—no Mr. Oliver came in sight. Only the squirrels chattered, and the cattle lowed, and the small birds sang and called to each other from tree to tree. Restless and unhappy, she turned once more toward her home, and coming out into the high road, paused beside the very stile against which William Hill leaned while bidding her his last silent goodbye. Did any hovering spirit—any subtle influence in the air reveal the fact to her? I think not. She glanced down at the initials, "W. H. K. A.", cut in the mossy wood, and framed in a true-lover's knot. She sighed as she saw them, it is true, but she little dreamed whose tears had moistened them only twelve hours before, as she took the old familiar seat and gazed anxiously down toward her present world, the "Bell" in Brook.

"Why don't he come?" the sick little heart was saying over and over again. "Oh, if he only knew how much I want to see him! I feel so sad—every one has been so unkind all day—and it is all so wretched. Yet if he would but come by for an instant and give me a kind word, or a pleasant smile, how different it would all be! I wonder what he is doing. Reading, perhaps, or writing in that new book of his. How beautiful those parts were that he read to me, the other evening! How nice it must be to

be able to write such things! O me! I wish I was clever; and then, perhaps, he would like me a little better than he does now. But I'm not! I'm only a simple, ignorant, little thing, scarcely fit to be his servant; and yet here I sit, expecting him to come to me, as if I was a born lady, and his equal, like Miss Marchmont. She is his equal; she is rich; she is clever; and I dare say poor William was right when he fancied that she was fond of him. Who would not be? He is so handsome, so kind, so good; just like the people one reads of in novels. And yet not too proud to speak to a little girl like me, not too proud to call me 'dear Kitty', to hold my hand—to—. Oh, why did he do it, if he did not care enough for me to meet me here to-night?"

She burst into a fit of passionate tears, laying her head down upon those rude carved letters, but not as William had done. She did not kiss them over and over again. At that moment she had quite forgotten that they were there.

And so the twilight faded, and the first stars came twinkling out in the deep-blue sky, and Kitty went sadly home. How softly the moon rose from behind the hills, how calmly she floated up through the Milky Way! How little she cared if tearful or smiling eyes were watching her stately progress all the while. Surely this sublime indifference of Nature to our bitterest woes, is one of the things that makes them even bitterer still.

A week passed by. A sad little note, post-marked Liverpool, and written on board an American liner, gave to Kitty poor William's last good wishes and farewell; but still Mr. Oliver made no sign. She knew that he had left the village; but news travels but slowly in the Forest, and not till the next market-day did she hear more. Then some neighboring farmer, dropping in at nightfall to talk with her father about the price of corn and the rising value of pigs, geese, and turkeys, let out, as if by accident, the fact of his having seen the "Lon'on gentleman" in Lyndhurst the day before, riding with one of the daughters of the lord of the manor, out toward the Forest, to see the hounds throw off.

There was a short silence after the communication; then the two men went on talking, and Kitty, watching her chance, wrapped herself in her gray mantle, stole silently out at the cottage-door, and went down the garden-path alone. Coming to her favorite meadow stile, she sat down upon it, hid her face in her hands, and tried to collect her scattered senses after the sudden blow she had received.

Mr. Oliver, then, was not in London! Urgent business had not called him back to town, as she had fondly hoped. He was at Lyndhurst, only a few miles away, and yet for a week he had neither seen nor written to her. He had gone without bidding her good-bye: he might, possibly, have no intention of meeting her again, while they two should live. And life—life was so long! What would it be to her without his smile, his love, to make it pleasant? It was a dreary look-out for Kitty, in the first flush of her opening existence.

I know as well as you, dear reader, that she was quite in the wrong. She ought not to have given her heart unasked; and least of all ought she to have given it to a man whose station was so far above her own, and to whom a woman's love was by no means so sacred a thing as it should have been. She should have been constant to the young farmer, who was worth a hundred Francis Olivers, had she but known it! But ah me! who in this world of ours does, habitually and continually, what they ought to do? Little Kitty turned from the draught of generous wine, brimming at her very lips, and hankered after the grapes hanging far out of reach, it is true! Is it more than you and I have done, in the course of our lives—more than, perhaps, we are doing now at this very moment? Cupid is the most uncertain, the most wrong-headed potentate in the universe; always shooting his arrows on the right hand, when he ought to be taking aim on the left; sure to be found in the palace, when he should have taken refuge in the peasant's cot. It was but one of his usual vagaries this

balking of the simplest happiness—this setting every one in the farmer's cottage by the ears.

Kitty, lingering at the stile as the moon rose and the chill winds went down, kept on that anxious, useless searching into cause and effect with which a loving nature like hers is sure to torture itself at such a time. Miss Marchmont, in the same position, would have looked the difficulty straight in the face—would have fought against it for an instant, and then, snapping her fingers with a stolid "What is to be must be", would have gone off to console herself with some excitement, easily procurable in the gay city life she lived. But Kitty, simple, loving, little child—could only plaint and murmur like a wounded dove, feeling her hurt, and her utter loneliness, and unable to imagine any remedy for it except the grand one—Death! And so she went on, wondering if she had said or done anything to offend Mr. Oliver during their last interview; if he would marry the lady at Lyndhurst (a bright, beautiful young creature, whom she knew well by sight,) if he would ever think of Brooks and the cottage—and—and her; and here the tears, that had been flowing silently, came faster; bending her head down upon her folded arms, she burst into an agony of weeping.

A figure which had been lingering for a few moments at the turn of the road, now advanced. A voice, which she knew only too well, called her by her name. She started up with a wild cry of joy, and saw Francis Oliver standing beside her. If he had planned a cold and quiet meeting—if he had thought often to himself during those days of absence, that he ought to look upon Kitty merely as a peasant little friend, and tell her so, all such ideas and scruples vanished the instant he saw that lovely face beaming brightly through its tears. How it happened he could not have told, but he held her the next instant in his arms—was kissing her lips, her cheeks, her hair, and calling her by a thousand pet names, as she sobbed upon his breast. After that, there was no retreating. Acting on the impulse of the moment, he had plunged headlong into the stream. Now he had only to let the rapid current bear him where it would. There was a sort of desperate pleasure in the thought that he was no longer a free agent—no longer able individually to control with honor the movements of his future life.

Kitty, blushing like a rose, freed herself at last from his embrace, without daring to look up at him.

"O, Mr. Oliver, what must you think of me?" she murmured.

"What can I think but one thing—that Kitty was very glad to see me," was his kind reply. "Two things, I ought to say; for I was equally glad to see Kitty. Have you thought of me, little one, as often as I have thought of you during this weary week?"

"I have thought of you every day and all day long," was her simple reply. "But I was afraid you had forgotten me. That was why I cried."

"Simple little girl! Did you think it was possible for me to forget you? Did you not see before I went away how dear you were growing?"

"You went without saying good-by," she whispered.

"That was wrong, I grant. But I have come back. You can forgive that one little sin—can you not, my love?"

She raised her radiant face. Forgive! What was the sin she could not overlook and forgive in him?

"I went," he continued, "because I fancied it was best for both of us. You were engaged to a good and kind-hearted man; and when I heard that he had gone, I thought that I might have been doing wrong. That the fact of your having known me might have influenced you more than it ought. In my decision, was I very vain, my love?"

"No," she answered, quietly.

It never occurred to her to deny or hide her love for him.

"I went away at once. I knew that some days must pass before he left England, and that in the meantime you might, if you chose, ask him to come back. I did not come to say good-

bye, because I dared not trust myself in your presence, and because I knew that the surest way to make you care for him again, and forget me, was to seem indifferent while he was so heart-broken. I went to Lyndhurst. I could not put myself quite out of your reach, you see; and when I heard that his vessel had really sailed, I came back to say what I say now—Kitty, I love you! Will you be my wife?"

Was she dreaming? No. He stood before her speaking gravely and earnestly, as a man should speak when he asks that question, and waiting for her answer (she thought) as anxiously as if she had been the first lady in the land, instead of a simple cottage-girl.

"Oh!" she sighed, "nothing could make me so happy—nothing! But, Mr. Oliver, are you sure you love me well enough for that? There are many ladies—born ladies—who are educated, and accomplished, and beautiful, who would be glad and proud to marry you."

He smiled a superior, self-satisfied smile. Whether Kitty was right or not, he evidently had but one opinion about the matter.

"Well, my wild rose, what then?"

"There was that lady whom we met in the Forest."

His face darkened suddenly.

"What of her?"

"She would suit you far better than I."

He bit his lip, but answered gayly:

"I hope you don't mean for a moment to compare this pretty little face with Miss Marchmont's? Why, she is positively ugly!"

Kitty gave a sigh of relief. She was not very deeply versed in such matters—the *odic force* would have been a heathenish mystery to her; and she never deemed for an instant that it was possible for a man to regard a woman with too favorable an eye after he had pronounced that fearful verdict against her: "Positively ugly!" Her heart was set at rest about Miss Marchmont from that moment.

"And the lady at Lyndhurst—the lady you rode out with?" she said, timidly.

"Ah! some one has been telling tales of me, I see," he replied, laughing. "My love, she is the daughter of a very old friend of mine—a mere school-girl; in fact. You need not be jealous of her."

He did not think it necessary to add that the "mere school-girl" was already engaged to a cornet in the Guards, and so wrapped up in thoughts of him, that she evidently scarcely knew if Mr. Oliver was by her side or not. "Truth should be spoken on all occasions," was his motto. Sometimes, as in this case, he added a little saving clause, which ran thus: "But all the truth need not always be told."

Kitty smiled gladly.

"I am not jealous, Mr. Oliver; only a little fearful. You are quite sure I am not too ignorant for you?"

"Quite sure, my love."

"Certain that you will not tire of me; certain that you will never wish you had married some one else—some one more worthy of you?"

He smiled, and smoothed the dark hair away from the loving, earnest face.

"Let this kiss answer, my child."

"Oh! not one of them would love you as I do," she cried. "I will serve you; I will be faithful to you; I will live for you alone, and if you tell me to go and die, I will do it, Mr. Oliver! I will make you happy. I know I can—"

Her tears finished the broken sentence; and, leaning her head against his arm, she let them flow freely. He stood supporting her in silence; his gaze wandered from her face over the quiet landscape, and then up to the calm night sky. He could not feel what Kitty felt—the ecstatic happiness of a first love revealed, and apparently returned—but he felt grateful and at rest. Her spirit stood upon the bright mountain-tops of youth and love, and bathed in the glad sunshine with exultant joy; he lingered far down in the shaded valley, but some chastened reflection of the light and glory fell around him even there! Life has so many different phases, so many very different moods! The gift-horse, which we look in the mouth at twenty, comes before us like a godsend at eight-and-thirty.

We start so freshly, so exultantly, on our journey that we are somewhat unreasonable in our demands; the best and brightest of everything alone will content us. But when day after day passes on, and the forced march is still kept up, and weary and footsore though we may be, we know that the tent of repose can never be pitched till we lie down in it to rise no more; at that stage we grow more humble, and take the goods the gods provide us, with thankful resignation. Instead of grumbling over our wretched fate, we say, meekly: "Thank Heaven it is no worse!" and so toil on to the end.

To this point Francis Oliver had now arrived. The world was no longer "all before him, where to choose"; there were three or four gray hairs in his right whisker, and incipient "crows' feet" tracking the corners of his fine dark eyes. More than once had he received a flying visit from that dreaded enemy, the gout. He could no longer walk twenty miles at a time without fatigue; and if he rode after the hounds, he found himself selecting convenient lanes, and dry ditches, and gaps in the hedges on his onward way, instead of taking five-barred gates and sunk fences, as he used to do in his earlier years. He had outgrown the fascinations of theatres, operas, and ballets; he cared little for concerts where his own peculiar favorites did not appear; the club was getting to be a dreary lounge, and his bachelor apartments were ten degrees worse. Then, too, his dancing days were over, and he had never been fond of whist; young ladies "just out" seemed little interested in his literary gossip, especially if any empty-headed guardsman of twenty-five hovered in the distance; his gay bachelor friends had all settled down into sober married men, and their wives looked somewhat coldly upon him; in short, he had outlived his own peculiar associations, ties, and intimacies, and must either set about creating new ones, or become a lonely, discontented, and disappointed man.

Here was the last turning-point in his existence. He had sense enough to recognize it, and to feel grateful that it was so pleasant a one. This was not the wife he would have chosen—*ance—not the wife he would have chosen now, perhaps, if he had not made that fatal blunder about Miss Marchmont at Stoney Cross.* But, at all events, putting Miss Marchmont out of the question, here was a good, innocent, pretty, young girl, pure as a lily, fresh as a rose, who loved him for himself alone—who would make his home happy, share his sorrows, and double his joys—who would look upon her husband as the greatest and best of men—who would be a pleasant and faithful companion to him for many a year, and a kind and tender nurse when he needed one. If fortune frowned upon him, Kitty still would smile; if the fickle public wearied of him, she would still be true; if other writers, greater than he, rose up in his place and jostled him from the broad highway of fame and public usefulness into narrow by-paths of literary drudgery, Kitty would never know, or, if she knew, would never believe that the fault was his, and the merit theirs. There was something in this reverent faith of hers in him and his talents that attracted him even more than her beauty, her grace, her youth. To have one disciple who would believe in him implicitly, no matter what doctrines he might teach—one subject who would obey her ruler loyally, and without a thought of rebellion—one friend who would trust him unreservedly, no matter what his shortcomings might be; this was what he wanted; this was what he had found! And he drew the little graceful head closer to his breast, and kissed the open brow, with an inward resolution to prize his treasure, according to its worth—to brighten forever, by his faithful love, the life that had so unselfishly merged itself in his own!

They entered the cottage together just as the farmer was coming to the door in search of his daughter. He eyed them grimly as they stood in the humble little room, hand clasping hand, smile answering smile.

"Humph!" he said, at last. "I suppose I see it all. What may your errand be here, Mr. Oliver?"

"To ask you to confirm what your daughter

has just said," replied Mr. Oliver, with courteous ease. "To ask you to give me Kitty for my wife."

"You can take her, sir," said the old man, bitterly. "When is it to be?"

"At once—next week—if you do not object."

Kitty looked dismayed. The day had not been named before, and the suddenness of the proposition almost took away her breath.

"The sooner the better, sir," was the farmer's reply. "And now say good-night to her, if you please."

There was no withholding him in that curt mood, and Mr. Oliver obeyed. No sooner had the door closed upon him, than Kitty was sent to bed without her father's usual kiss and blessing. He was evidently deeply hurt and displeased at the turn the affair had taken. Yet she dared utter no word of excuse either for her lover or herself.

The week passed by all too quickly; and on the following Monday the church was crowded with the village people; and Kitty, in the presence of all who had known and loved her from her infancy, gave her hand where her heart had been bestowed, and left the church—Katharine Atherton no longer. She was to start at once upon her bridal tour, and was to say farewell to her friends there and then, instead of returning to her father's house. A bevy of young girls and matrons closed around her as she left the church porch—then she flung herself upon her father's neck—kissed her aunts—patted the old house-dog kindly, and was gone.

The group of friends and neighbors stood looking after the retreating carriage in silence. To the young village-girls, it was as if a fairy prince had suddenly appeared and chosen his bride from their ranks; but then mothers shook their heads and sighed when they asked of the bridegroom, and turned to look after the poor old farmer and his dog going slowly across the fields toward home.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Couldst thou look as dear as when
First I sighed for thee;
Couldst thou make me feel again
Every wish I breathed thee then,
Oh, how blissful life would be!
Hopes, that now beguiling leave me,
Joys, that lie in slumber cold—
All would wake, if thou couldst give me,
One dear smile like those of old."

—MOORE.

Miss Marchmont, like the rich man of old, had "many possessions". They did not exactly take the patriarchal form of "flocks and herds", it is true; but she had a house in town, a seat in the country, some warehouses in Manchester, and the fourth part of an export business in Liverpool, figuring upon her rent-roll; and the sum she was justified in spending per annum would have sufficed to support a large family, had she been blessed with one. Therefore, it was not strange if, when a whim seized upon her, she made haste, out of her full purse, to gratify it. She was continually buying something or other; now a horse—now a picture—now a set of splendidly-bound books. Her latest purchase had been made after reading the history of the little dairy village which a queen of France once amused herself with building—the village where she and her maids of honor tripped about in little wooden clogs, and made butter, and gave the king and his courtiers draughts of milk from real wooden pails. Miss Marchmont laughed at the picture at first, it is true; but it seemed to haunt her; and since she could not have a whole village to herself, she determined to have a house. Not an elegant country-seat, where her fashionable friends, devoured by ennui, might come and wear away an hour or two, and yawn over Nature's calmest beauties—as a certain duke at Twickenham once yawned over the unreasonable Thames, which "will keep running and running for ever, and I so weary of it!" No—her fashionable friends might visit her at March Hill as often as they liked; but into her new home they should never intrude. It should be at a very short distance from town, so that she might go to and fro as she liked. It should be

perfectly rural; it should have a little garden, a little "vine and fig tree", a stable for her horse, a kennel for her dog, a study for herself, and it should be called "The Growlery".

She set out on her travels one windy afternoon, and, at a distance of six miles from London, found the very thing she sought—a little two-story, square-fronted brick cottage, not more than five minutes' walk from the station, standing in its own grounds, and secured from the gaze of curious pedestrians by high walls that inclosed the whole place. The rooms were small, but light and convenient; they were furnished nicely, and the place could be taken at once, if she liked. Miss Marchmont was always prompt in her movements. She went through the house, examined the furniture, looked over the stable, walked up and down the lawn once or twice, and then went straight to the agent's office, where she signed an agreement which gave her the sole use and enjoyment of the premises for one year. The next afternoon she came again with a quantity of baggage, her housekeeper, and one or two old servants; and by the end of the week, "The Growlery" was in full occupation, and she as contented in her little rooms as if she had lived there all her life.

Not one of her London acquaintances possessed the clue to her retreat. Each evening found her at ball, theatre, or opera, as usual; but the long and pleasant day was spent in her suburban home—spent in writing, in reading, in country walks, or rides with her bay mare, "Fanny", and her Newfoundland, "Fred". The healthful exercise, the perfect rest and quiet, and sweet, fresh air did her a world of good. She dropped all her burdens when the gate of "The Growlery" closed upon her, and only resumed them when she left her home once more. Even the old wound was well-nigh healed (at least she fancied so), and she ceased to busy herself with conjectures as to the movements of Francis Oliver, and tried her best to put away those harsh and bitter thoughts of him which had made her whole life, in one sense, an utter blank. He had not treated her kindly—no matter, she could forgive him now! Years ago, when they first met, he had paid her marked attention, had seemed almost to love her—had drawn back suddenly and left her without the slightest explanation. She had borne it in silence. What woman likes to talk of slights endured, of affection given only to be betrayed? What pity has the world for misfortunes like these?

Miss Marchmont had been wise enough to hold her tongue, and drink the bitter draught held to her lips with all due outward propriety. How the pierced heart raged and bled beneath that vail of decorous calm, it is not for me to say; suffice it, that the struggle was over, and that none except God and herself knew that it had been. And now, among the gentle influences of her changed life, the "stirrings and searchings" of the old wound grew fainter, and seemed at last to die entirely away.

She sat before the piano one Sabbath morning, looking out into the garden as she played a hymn in a minor key—a melancholy, wailing thing, and yet she loved it. It was a master-hand that touched the instrument, and it gave forth its sweetest melody, as if in thanks. By-and-by, all was silent.

Her Newfoundland came up the garden path, and stood outside the parlor window, looking at his mistress with wagging tail and half-laughing, open mouth. She did not refuse the mute invitation to a walk, but went down the steps, and allowed him to escort her across the lawn and back again. The dog turned off at last, and went snuffing and spying about the hedge that divided her grounds from those of her neighbor. Presently he uttered a low growl. Miss Marchmont went to see what had displeased him, and came upon a scene that transfixed her with astonishment.

Within those grounds, and plainly visible through the leafless hedge, a lady and gentleman were walking. The lady wore a black moiré antique dress, a velvet oak, and a white silk bonnet decked with snowy plumes. The gentleman was dressed in black, and carried a

small lacquered cane that looked strangely familiar to Miss Marchmont's eyes. When she first saw them, their backs were toward her—presently they turned, and she uttered a faint exclamation, and staggered back as if she had received a blow. She watched them go down the broad walk arm-in-arm, heard the gate close behind them, and knew that they were going to church; for the last bell had already begun to ring.

She stood listening for a moment till the faintest echo of their steps and voices had died away; then sank down upon a little garden seat, clasped her hands around the neck of the dog, who was looking up in her face and whining, and laid her aching head on his.

She needed to think—she needed a moment's rest. For she had looked once more on Francis Oliver's face, and it needed no words to tell her that it was his bride who leaned upon his arm!

CHAPTER IX.

"Oh, there's nothing left me now
But to mourn the past!
Vain was every ardent vow—
Never yet did Heaven allow
Love so warm, so wild, to last.
Not even hope could now deceive me,
Life itself looks dark and cold:
Oh, thou never more canst give me
One dear smile like those of old!"

—MOORE.

So much for battles fought—for fancied victories won! At the first unexpected sight of the man she had once loved, this woman philosopher threw down lance and shield, and owned herself vanquished!

Had she met him in any other way, her weakness would not have been so plainly manifested to herself. To have seen him in those gay social circles, to which they both of right belonged, would have been as nothing. There no one would have had a greater claim upon him—no one could have boasted a closer intimacy with him than herself. But this vision of his hidden happiness—this glimpse of his domestic peace, wounded her cruelly. The sight of that gentle, pretty girl, who had a right to lean upon his arm and look up so fondly into his face, was bitter for a time. * * *

The church-bells ceased to ring. She dashed the tears from her eyes impatiently. It seemed to her a childish thing to sit and weep over what was past recalling. She had no patience with the weakness which she could not at that instant conquer.

It was the old story—the old railway verdict of "Nobody to blame". There had been no positive word of love spoken, no real engagement made. They had separated in America, and when they met once more in England, the lady was too proud to encourage a hesitating lover, the gentleman too shy to make advances to a belle, an heiress, a successful authoress, when he had seemed to slight and forget the timid girl of sixteen. They met often in society, but only as "people in society" meet. Each thought of the other, cared for the other more than they would have dared to own, but still the ice was unbroken—still the cordial word withheld. Never had they come so near the old familiar days as when they shook hands beneath the New Forest oaks. It was possible, then, to revive the long-buried love, and to renew the broken dream. Had fate been kinder, how much of pain, of weariness, of restless, dissatisfied longing might have been spared those two long-severed hearts! A word, a look, would have told them all in time; but the hour went by, and all was lost!

* * * * *

The morning passed away, and footsteps and voices in the road beyond the garden walls showed that people were returning from church, Miss Marchmont rose from her seat, and patted her dog's head.

"Well, Master Frederick," she said, half jestingly, half bitterly, "accidents will happen in the best regulated families, and if we chance to get our fingers pinched as the world goes round, 'tis little use crying out. What is to be, must be! 'Tis a broken life, in good truth, my Fred, and we must even pick up the pieces and patch them together as best we can."

She went into the house. Her early dinner

was just ready; she sat down and ate far too heartily for a heroine. Then, ordering the carriage, she drove back to her house in town. She was determined to put an end to all sentimental remembrances by a course of hard study and hard work. She could not have made a more sensible resolution at that particular time!

For two days Miss Marchmont wrote very steadily in her London home. On the third evening she pushed aside her desk and papers soon after tea, yawned, and muttering that she did not see any need of making a Carmelite nun of herself, even if Mr. Oliver was married, went up stairs to dress. Presently she came down, looking her very best, ordered the carriage, and was driven to Madame G——'s, where the usual Wednesday *soirée*, for birds of Miss Marchmont's feather, was held. The rooms were quite full when she entered, and she was greeted with a chorus of exclamations and rejoicings from her most intimate acquaintances, who were herding together according to their wont, in the first vacant corner they could find, and launching witticisms and criticisms at and upon every one who passed. Miss Marchmont joined them gladly. The sparkling conversation, the witty jests were such a relief, after the enforced solitude of the last week.

"What an idiot I was," she thought to herself, "to shut myself up, even for one single day, for the sake of any man on earth! I have loved and I have lost, it is true. How many of these gigglers around me have done the same, and yet see how they enjoy themselves! The wine of life is not quite at its dregs while I can come here and laugh as heartily as I have done to-night. The past—bah! a sickly dream—a pale ray of moonlight. Let it go, and I will take the joyous, rollicking present to my heart, and be merry while I may. This is what I want—gay spirits around me, warm hands to meet my own—and love—love 'may go to Hong Kong for me', as the old song says. Come—I am certainly growing young once more!"

As she concluded this inward paean of rejoicing, she looked across the room, and saw Francis Oliver, sitting much at his ease beside a well-known authoress, listening and laughing while she defended with her usual zeal an absurd theory about the "lost tribes" with which she had become bitten during the course of an Eastern tour. Miss Marchmont started and colored violently, it is true, but recovered her composure in an amazingly short time, all things considered. The knowledge of Mr. Oliver's marriage had gone further to cure her of her life-long passion, than even she herself was aware of. Without looking at the question from a moral point of view, there is not, after all, much sentiment or romance in loving a married man. He may have been more deeply attached to you than to his wife—he may find it extremely difficult to forget you, but still she has an advantage over you which tells wonderfully in the long run. It is from her, not from you, that all his comforts and indulgences must come. It is her hand, not yours, that must keep the hearth bright, and the home tidy; it is her gentleness that must soothe—her kindness that must console him. She is with him by day and by night, while you sit afar off—a pale shadow beside a fair substance of flesh and blood. Is it wonderful that in time he should reward her patient love and faithful tenderness by giving her a closer, warmer place in his heart than you held, even when he loved you most! I think not—and surely no woman can complain at seeing such justice done. But at the same time the almost certain knowledge—that this must be so, goes very far to cool an affection in many a heart, that would be guilty, if encouraged, and does much to keep the balance of right and wrong more evenly adjusted in this blundering world than they would otherwise be.

Miss Marchmont thought of all these things while she stood looking for a few moments at her first love's face. Then she took a sudden resolution; she walked across the room, looked straight into his eyes with a pleasant smile, and held out her hand. Mr. Oliver, who had not

expected to see her there, was fairly taken by surprise for an instant, and colored like a girl. He rose, shook hands with her, fired a parting shot at his antagonist and her ten tribes, and then offered his arm to Miss Marchmont. They went through the next room, and took refuge in a small *boudoir* well known to the frequenters of Madame G——'s *soirées*.

"Who would have thought of seeing you here?" he said, as he gave her a seat upon a tête-à-tête chair, and placed himself opposite.

"Why should I not come?" she asked.

"Oh, they told me you had retired from the world—turned Trappist, or something of that kind!"

"It looks like it, certainly," she replied, glancing down at her evening dress. "I have been hard at work for the last week—that is all."

"I ought to apologize for not answering the note you were kind enough to send me from Stoney Cross," he said, after a short embarrassed silence. "I was asleep when it came. The moment I read it, I set off for the inn—but you had gone."

"Yes," she said, negligently arranging the lace upon her dress. "I was called suddenly back to town. The note was of no consequence except to you. I hope you were a good boy, and took the advice I gave you."

He smiled.

"I went to Lyndhurst soon after."

"And back to Brook—when?" she answered brusquely. "When did you leave Hampshire?"

"I scarcely know—it seems to me a hundred years since I was there."

"Indeed! And how did you leave all the good people?"

"Quite well and happy."

"William Hill?"

"He has gone to America."

"I see! And Miss Kitty?"

"She was—that is to say, she is quite well," stammered Mr. Oliver, turning very red beneath her penetrating glance.

"And you—what are you doing?"

"Not much, just at present."

"Where is the new book I have been promised so long—for a month back, at least?"

He shrugged his shoulders with a comical smile.

"Publishers will do such things; you know that as well as I. If they choose to advertise a thing before it is ready, they must take the consequences."

"Do you mean to say it is not yet in the press?"

"My dear Miss Marchmont, there are not more than fifty chapters finished, and 'tis to be a novel in three volumes!"

"But why don't you go to work?"

"Can't!"

"What nonsense!"

He sighed.

"Come," she said, frankly, "make a clean breast of it. What ails you?"

"I wish I knew."

"Shall I tell you?"

"If you can."

"You are getting lazy."

"Oh!"

"Or else you are getting old."

"That sounds much more to the purpose."

"How old are you, Mr. Oliver?"

"As if you did not know."

"Upon my word, if I ever knew, I have quite forgotten. Tell me."

"Thirty-five!"

"You speak it as if it were ninety. Now let me appeal to your good sense."

"Don't! I have not the article—never had."

"Will you listen? Let me ask you if the thirty-fifth year of a man's life is the year in which he ought to sit down, fold his hands before him, and say that his work is done?"

"That depends upon circumstances. If he be as tired of his work as I am, I should say yes, most decidedly."

"But why need you be tired?"

"What a perfect interrogation point you are making of yourself this evening!"

"Never mind that. Answer."

"Well—I am tired—because—because I am tired. That is all the reason I can give, upon my honor. I know that the freshness and

glory of life has gone for ever. I cannot say how or why. I know that I have no longer that faith in myself and my work that used to make it so delightful to me. I cudgel my poor, tired brains mechanically, it is true, but I seem to produce nothing. I have not patience to read anything I write, except in correcting my proofs, and when a man comes to that pass, two pennyworth of cord or a mild dose of prussic acid is the best remedy for his complaint."

"But other people like to read your stories as well as ever."

"It shows their want of taste."

"Oh, you are incorrigible! However, I will not be too hard upon you; you are not responsible for what you say. And I know only too well from experience that the state of mind you describe is its own best punishment."

"You have felt it, then; this unutterable disgust, this weariness of everything, and of yourself and your own works most of all?"

"I have, often. And I know of nothing more horrible. It is as if a mother should lose faith in her best-beloved child, and cease to hope for his future, here and hereafter. I don't know that there is any remedy for it except time and patience. Time certainly sets all things right."

He sighed.

"Yes. It will matter little a hundred years hence that we have felt this depression, known these disappointments. Yet, after all, that is but poor consolation. A hundred years hence, and our dust will lie quiet enough, but it is now! now!" he added, kindling up, "that we want our reward; now, that we want our happiness! When I look round this beautiful world, and feel how evidently it was made for a happy race to dwell upon, and then see the misery of every kind and degree that abounds, I grow sick—positively sick! A ruined world, they call it! Oh, they mistake! She is fresh and fair enough, this Mother Earth of ours. It is we who are all wrong—we who are ruined! And we might be so peaceful here!"

"You are a heathen and an earth-worshipper," said Miss Marchmont, coolly. "I suppose you will continue so till you die. But, then, I think your eyes will be opened to the beauty of another and a more enduring world than this where all these yearnings will be satisfied—all these heart-pangs stilled."

"You believe in such a world, then?"

"Yes; and so do you."

He did not deny it. He only leaned his head upon his hand, and sighed with such a look of utter weariness, that she took pity on him.

"What can ail you? I saw you happy enough, just now, talking with Mrs. H—— about her beloved lost tribes."

"Oh, yes! That woman refreshes me. So does any one who has a hobby. I would give the world to find one for myself that I could be content to ride."

"Make one, then."

"'Tis easier said than done. A hobby-horse goes always on four legs—faith, energy, enthusiasm, and hope. And I'm not able to furnish one. Ah, how differently I used to talk to you once. Do you remember—in America?"

"Yes."

She answered rather stiffly, and turned her head away.

"There was something in the very air of those New England mountains that inspired one with belief in the most ridiculous impossibilities. I could have gone on tilting at windmills all my life, I think, if I had remained there. And you were gayer, I think, there, than you are here."

"I was sixteen years old then, and now I am almost thirty," was the brief reply.

"True, true! Ah me, how time flies, and how very differently one's life is arranged to what he thinks it will be when he first begins it!"

It was an awkward and dangerous subject for them to touch upon. Miss Marchmont felt it so, and manoeuvred herself out of the difficulty with great skill.

"Happily there is no need for you to sentimentalize over bygone days, or sigh over the way in which your life has been arranged for you."

"What do you mean?"

"I know a cottage about five miles from London Bridge," she went on, with a mysterious smile; "and in that cottage lives a maiden lady with her housekeeper and her dog. Next to that cottage is another called 'Gan-Eden'—Mr. Oliver started and blushed deeply. "Which is an Eden, indeed, if one may judge from its Adam and Eve. Do you want to know the maiden lady's name?"

He did not answer, but sat looking on the ground, the very picture of confusion.

"It is Olive Marchmont. And to-morrow she is going to call on Adam and Eve. And to-day week she is going to invite them to dinner. Good-night, Mr. Oliver."

She made a sweeping courtesy, and was about to walk away. But he sprang up and stood before her.

"Don't leave me like that. You have discovered my secret. Well, I own that I am married."

"Many thanks for the confession. You make a merit of necessity, like the rest of your amiable sex, and claim credit for doing what you are positively compelled to do. I am ashamed of you, Mr. Oliver."

"I know I have done wrong. I ought, at least, to have told you."

"You ought to have told the public. I am only one of its humble members. And, in its name, I ask you if you have any right to place the woman you love in a false position in its eyes?"

"I know I have not."

"Then, why do you keep your marriage secret?"

"I was married publicly enough, if that is all," he said, bitterly. "Every old farmer—every little child in the parish came to gape at me on my wedding-day."

"So much the better. But you aware that a marriage, taking place in an obscure country village, may not be known in London on the same day. Besides, if you are not concealing the fact of your marriage, why do I find you here in the character of a bachelor? Why is not your wife with you?"

He bit his lip, played with his watch-chain a moment, and then it all came out.

"Look here, Miss Marchmont. You are a woman of sense, and will not accuse me of being a monster of cruelty, when I say what I am going to say. Circumstances, over which I had no control, forced this marriage upon me. Little Kitty loved me dearly. I don't mind telling you that—and when I found that she had really given her heart to me, I could not, as a man of honor, draw back. Besides, I broke no tie—pained no heart by marrying her. Not a creature on earth loved me before."

He was gazing earnestly in her face as he spoke. If he expected that firmly-set mouth to soften, that steady eye to turn away in confused denial of his statements, he was disappointed.

"Well," she said, coolly, "I quite understand your position. It was the best thing you could do for your yourself. I don't think you were half good enough for her, but if she is satisfied, all is well."

"She dotes on me! She worships the very ground I tread on!" he cried, stung by her indifference.

"You are a lucky man. Why don't you give the world at large a peep at your domestic happiness?"

"Ah—there's the rub! Kitty is an angel—but she is also a farmer's daughter. She knows nothing of the rules of society. How can I introduce her? If she should commit any blunder, I believe it would kill me!"

"Oh, you men!" burst out Miss Marchmont, with indignant scorn. "Lest your vanity should be wounded, and your pride hurt, you condemn that pretty young creature to the dreariest solitude, while you go about enjoying yourself! I tell you I won't have it! You are not going to make her miserable while I can help it. I dare say she is crying her eyes out for you at home this very moment, while you are lamenting over her ignorance of the rules of society! I have no patience with you! And this non-

sense must be done away with directly. Tell Mrs. Oliver I am coming to call on her to-morrow morning. Rules of society, indeed! Good-night!"

She went into the next room, fuming to herself all the way.

"A pretty scrape I have got myself into!" thought Mr. Oliver, as he left the house. "Confound Miss Marchmont! Why can't she attend to her own business and let mine alone?"

He said nothing to Kitty that night of the threatened invasion; nor could he summon courage to do so the next morning. He went off to town instead, very early, feeling positively afraid to face the visitor, or to witness the meeting.

At twelve o'clock, just as Kitty was walking up and down the garden, thinking somewhat drearily of Brook and her poor old father, a great black Newfoundland dog came blundering through a little gate in the opposite hedge and began to bark at her. He was followed by a lady dressed in black. Kitty's heart stood still. She recognized the stranger of the New Forest. Miss Marchmont walked straight up to her and took her hand.

"My dear, you must excuse this most unceremonious visit, and the bad behavior of Master Frederick," she said. "I found, by the merest accident, that you were living here, and so ran in just as I was. We are near neighbor's, Mrs. Oliver; I hope I may soon add, we are near friends."

Kitty looked a moment into the frank, smiling eyes, and all doubts and suspicions of their owner vanished like the morning mist before the morning sun. If Miss Marchmont and Mr. Oliver had ever been fond of each other, would she have sought out his wife in this marked friendly manner? Oh no! She pressed the kind hand that held her own, and said, shyly, that she longed for a friend. Miss Marchmont bent down and kissed her. From that moment they were like sisters.

One week from that day, Miss Marchmont was "At Home" in Mayfair. Her pretty drawing-rooms were thronged with her literary acquaintances, all of whom were set on the *qui vive* by her promise of an introduction to a new beauty before the evening was over. At ten o'clock, just as the freshness and interest of the literary discussions were beginning to die away, the servant threw open the door, and announced "Mr. and Mrs. Oliver."

There was a general murmur of surprise, and every one came hurrying from the other rooms, in time to see Miss Marchmont advance to receive her guests. It was no mistake on the part of the servant! Francis Oliver stood before them, with a ludicrously stiff and embarrassed air, and Miss Marchmont was shaking hands with a little fairy in white silk, with a wreath of lilies of the valley in her dark hair—the prettiest woman who had made her *début* in a London drawing-room during the whole season.

CHAPTER X.

"Ay, though it throb at gentlest touch,
At sorrow's faintest call;
'Twere better it should ache too much
Than never ache at all.
The heart—the heart that's truly blessed,
Is never all its own;
No ray of glory lights the breast
That beats for self alone."—ELIZA COOK.

Nowhere did Miss Marchmont appear to greater advantage than in her own house. Abroad, she was often apt to be somewhat *brusque* in her manner, somewhat dictatorial in her mode of speech; but when she received her guests beneath her own roof, all this harshness was toned down, and a gentle anxiety to please, which was infinitely more charming, took its place. Under the protection of her own household gods she could afford to be her better self, and the stranger within her gates was as sacred in her eyes as if she had been born beneath the tent of a Bedouin sheik. No one ever had reason to complain of their welcome or their entertainment in Mayfair, however coldly the lady of the house might have treated them at other times, and in other homes.

Kitty's visit had, of course, been confined to

the rustic circle of which she was the favorite and the belle. In that humble village people went to see each other, because they found pleasure in so doing, and welcomed each other kindly, because their hearts were full of good will. The country-girl was simple enough to imagine that the same state of things existed in London. She knew nothing of the art of freezing human beings into nonentities, which is practised with such perfect success in good society. She had no idea that a host or hostess might, like "Mary in the birchen lane" of the old song, often "say one thing and mean another", and welcome her cordially to house and home with their lips, while in their hearts they wished her at the bottom of the Red Sea. Consequently, the marked kindness of Miss Marchmont's reception was in one sense lost upon her. But Mr. Oliver felt it deeply. Whatever Miss Marchmont did, became the fashion among her own peculiar circle, and there was little fear of Kitty after she had been so kindly sheltered by that protecting hand.

It was a nervous ordeal for so proud and so sensitive a man. The men and women to whom his wife were about to be presented, were of the royal rank in literature, highly educated, satirical, and fastidious to a fault. Among the group was one of the most celebrated writers of the day, famous above all other things for the skill with which he fastened upon some salient point in a character, gave it a humorous twist, and held it up for the amusement of his readers. The man could no more help quizzing than he could breathing; what if he should select Kitty as the model for his new heroine? Mr. Oliver trembled and wiped his forehead at the bare idea, and finally sought refuge in the chess-parlor, quite unable to stand and watch the process of victimization as it went on.

Mr. Oliver called himself a student of human nature, and flattered himself that he understood the world and its people a trifle better than most of his neighbors. But, with all his wisdom, he had never learned one thing, which little Kitty seemed to understand intuitively. It was this. That no man or woman can ever be ridiculous so long as they are simply and naturally themselves. If we go frankly into society and say, "Here I am, ugly, awkward, and stupid, it may be, but still ready to do my best to please," we are accepted as frankly among those whose opinion is worth caring for; and our ugliness, our awkwardness, our stupidity is forgiven and overlooked. But when we seek to go beyond our natural places—when we wear borrowed feathers—when we ape airs and graces—when we endeavor in every way possible, as the old song has it, "to astonish the Browns", we make spectacles of ourselves; and, as a matter of course, find society laughing heartily, both at the attempts and the ludicrous failures.

Little Kitty met her new acquaintances frankly and simply, but with a shy, timid grace that went very far to win their hearts. She talked with people, who had hitherto been known to her only through their books, and, with their help, talked very well. Miss Marchmont said little, but listened attentively and watched Kitty's face when she was not looking her way. The great humorist sat down beside the young wife, and seemed to forget that his mission in life was to quiz every human being who fell in his way, for he was listening to her account of the little cottage, and the good old father, and the faithful house-dog she had left behind, as if she was repeating a sweet little poem. A young poet, who had been admiring her fresh and artless beauty for some time in silence, now joined in the conversation, and asked her some question about the New Forest. There Kitty was perfectly at home. Her face flushed up, her eyes kindled, her lips smiled upon the speaker, and for the next ten minutes green trees waved over the heads of the listeners, forest brooks murmured, and wild birds sang. Kitty had that gift of description which places a scene before the hearer's eye, with all its poetry of life, and color and motion, and the authors exchanged glances when she finished, as if they discovered an unexpected prize. Then the "lady of the lost tribes", as the eastern authoress was sportively nicknamed, sat down to the piano, and, urged by her and by them all, Kitty

sang a quaint little forest ballad, which she had warbled many a time in the hot summer afternoons beside that well-remembered brook. Her voice, though not peculiarly strong, was very sweet, and the simple, sad music suited it well. Mr. Oliver entered just as the last notes were dying away, and could scarcely believe his eyes when he saw the group that pressed around her with smiles and thanks. As soon as possible he contrived to get beside Miss Marchmont and cross-question her.

"What is it? what have they been doing with her? what has she been singing?"

"One of the sweetest ballads you ever heard in your life. Do you know, Mr. Oliver, she has quite surprised me. I had no idea there was so much in her."

"In little Kitty?"

His eyes dwelt upon his wife a moment with surprise. He could see her beauty, her youth, her freshness as well as any one, but self-esteem blinded him to all else that was worthy of admiration about her. If the humorist had come up to him and said: "Sir, I admire your wife, and consider her a clever as well as a beautiful woman," he would have felt sure that the man was laughing at him in his sleeve. Kitty was good, she was gentle, she was devoted, faithful, sweet-tempered, and obliging, he was ready to acknowledge all that. But as for any latent talent, any hidden genius, any possibility or probability of cleverness beneath that simple modest exterior—pshaw! the idea was quite ridiculous!

So blinded, he took her home that evening when the pleasant party broke up. And since he could not hide from himself that her first appearance had been a decided success, he set it modestly down to the fact of her being his wife! It was to him and to his works that this indirect homage was paid! And, with this gratifying reflection, he bade Kitty good-night and went placidly to sleep.

CHAPTER XI.

"There's a love that keeps
A constant watch-fire light,
With a flame that never sleeps
Through the longest winter night.
It is not always wise,
And it is not always blest,
For it bringeth tearful eyes,
And it leaves a sighing breast.
A fairer lot hath he
Who loves awhile, then goes,
Like the linnet from the tree,
Or the wild bee from the rose.
O love! love! love!
Soon makes the hair turn gray;
When only one fills all the heart,
And that one's far away."

—ELIZA COOK.

Some months passed by, and the beautiful summer was upon the earth once more. Gan Eden smiled in the warm sunshine; but the face of its young mistress was paler and more thoughtful than of old. Something was evidently wrong. Was it the home? It could scarce be that.

And yet, as she sat looking out upon the lawn and garden that beautiful May day, she seemed to take little note of birds, of sunshine, or of flowers. Her husband's last book, fresh from the press, was lying open on her knee.

* * * * *

Kitty, after she had read it, leaned her cheek upon her hand, and went off into a reverie of the most sombre description. The publishing of that book had been a bitter mortification to her. It was full of cutting allusions, of bitter complainings, which she understood better than any of its other readers could possibly do.

It seemed strange, indeed, that domestic misery should enter that modern paradise, and so soon!

Living with scarcely a wish ungratified, what cause was there for Kitty's lips ever to breathe a sigh, or for Kitty's heart to throb wearily in her bosom? For a time she had been perfectly happy. Her home was a beautiful one; every wish she formed was quickly indulged, and her husband was as fond and devoted as her lover had been. It was long, long before she would own that she ever missed the small white cottage at Brook, even in her dreams.

For three months the sunshine lasted; then the shadow came. By degrees a dreadful fear

crept over the young wife's heart. Could it be that Francis loved her less than when he wooed her from her humble home? He was not often with her. He was scrupulously polite in public, but silent and careless in his manner in private. He yawned, too, scores of times, when she was singing, and excused himself from a *tête-à-tête* at the fireside, by a plea of "business" each evening. She knew it was a false one; she knew he had no "business to occupy his time; and she grew pale and ill with jealousy—of what or whom she could not say at first.

This was the state of things to which her husband, in his latest additions to his new novel, had made such unnecessary, such cruel allusions. As she read the passages, and knew why, how, and when he had penned them, her courage and her faith gave way.

Thinking all these melancholy thoughts, with the bright May sunshine falling pleasantly around her, Kitty heard a light step in the passage—a light knock at the door.

"Enter," she said, listlessly, for she knew it was not her husband; and Miss Marchmont came in, and put her arm around her waist.

"Alone, and sad, I think," she said, gently.

"You are right."

"And what can make you sad?"

Kitty did not answer for a moment. Then she looked up in her friend's face.

"Will you be angry if I ask you a question?"

"I am never angry with you. Ask what you like."

"Why have you never married, Olive?"

The lady's cheek flushed deeply.

"Some people would perhaps say because I could not. You know to the contrary, however. There is a reason; but I would rather not tell it to you."

"I heard you give one last night, Olive, to your cousin Margaret."

"Where were you?"

"Sleeping on the divan in the library at your house. Your voices awoke me. That was the first thing I heard, and the last you said."

"Good heavens, Kitty! I did not mean—"

"I know you would not have said it, if you had known I was there. I think I shall never forget the words: that you had avoided marriage because you believed a man always tired of his wife—that when Mr. Oliver married, you hoped to see the exception to the rule—but—" Kitty's voice faltered sadly—"since he had known La Stella, you feared he was like all his kind."

Miss Marchmont looked and felt deeply distressed. But she could not retract her words, or tell the young wife that her information was incorrect.

"Have you seen Mr. Oliver since?" she asked, at last.

"No. O Olive! I have not spoken to him for three days! He has scarcely been in the house during that time. He who was always by my side once. It will kill me. I shall die."

"No." And Miss Marchmont bent down and kissed her tears away. "You shall live, Kitty, to win him back again. I am sure he loves you after all. Courage! All will yet be well."

"When?" said Kitty, with a heavy sigh. "Ah, Olive, my heart is breaking! I thought I could make him so happy; and it seems to me that he scarcely knows if I am in the world or out of it. Look at his book, too! What will people think of him—of me—of our home—when they see it? Oh, it is too hard—too hard!"

And, burying her face in her hands, she burst into a passionate fit of weeping.

Miss Marchmont scarcely knew what to say. Mr. Oliver's admiration of the new singer was a standing jest among his friends; and though she had hoped to keep it a secret from Kitty, it was out at last. Vexed and annoyed with herself for having been the means of enlightening her, she sat in silence till the storm passed over, and then did her best to heal the wound she had so carelessly made.

"My dear child, don't cry so," she said. "It is nothing—nothing, I assure you. I had heard

some idle gossip which I ought not to have listened to for a moment, still less repeated. If you go on like that, you will make me very unhappy."

"How can I help it?" said Kitty, wiping away her tears. "I see that he has ceased to care for me; and I, oh, I love him more dearly than ever! Why did this woman come here to take him from me?"

"My dear, if all reports are true, she does not care a pin for him; so there is no necessity for you to cry your eyes out on her account."

"Tell me all you know about it."

"I suppose I know quite as much as my neighbors, which is really very little after all. La Stella is very good looking, very graceful, very fascinating, and Mr. Oliver has been foolish enough to express his admiration of her rather more publicly than a married man ought to do. That is all, upon my word, Kitty. La Stella is quite as respectable as you or I, for ought I know to the contrary. She lives very quietly with her poor old mother, and she is engaged to a young Italian, who often sings with her. They say she laughs heartily at Mr. Oliver's infatuation, and has never encouraged it in the least. In fact, I do not think he ever saw her off the stage in his life."

Kitty breathed more freely for a moment.

"Have you ever seen La Stella?" she asked. "Once or twice."

"I must see her, too. She sings to-night. You must go with me to London."

"My dear child!"

"You must!"

"Do you know I am almost sure that Mr. Oliver will be there?"

"Well, I cannot help it," said Kitty, defiantly. "I shall go all the same."

In that willful mood there was no controlling her, and Miss Marchmont gave way. That evening they entered a private box at the opera, and took their places just as the overture was finished.

The house was crammed from pit to ceiling, and every eye was fixed anxiously upon the orchestra, whose signal was to bring the queen of the night before them.

Kitty, gazing eagerly about the house, and only for one face, soon discovered it. Her husband sat alone in the stage-box; his head leaned upon his hand; he trifled with a crown of roses lying on the cushion before him; he looked pale, and the poor wife thought, also, sad. Was he by chance thinking of her, and the roses, she gave him at the garden-gate of her father's cottage, not many months ago?

A low aerial strain breathed from a score of instruments gave the preconcerted signal. As if in answer to the magic music, a slender, graceful figure stood before them, dressed in the flowing robes, and crowned with the wreath of "Norma".

Kitty leaned forward, and looked at her eagerly. That was La Stella—the woman who had won her husband's heart. She felt sure of it, as she watched him while scene after scene passed on.

Seemingly unconscious of the critical eyes that were watching, and the critical ears that were listening, La Stella threw herself into her part with an intense earnestness that subdued and thrilled her hearers, and hushed them to a perfect silence. She smiled to herself at that great tribute to her genius, as she leaned against a pillar, exhausted with her overwrought feelings.

The multitude, recovered from their trance, began to shout for "La Stella".

The manager brought her before the curtain. Every one rose instinctively; and the theatre was a scene of frightful excitement. "La Stella!" "La Stella!" was the shout from tier to tier, and among the deluge of wreaths and bouquets that fell as her feet, a crown of snow-white roses was seen to flutter down; she stooped for it herself, and, casting a glance toward the giver, went off the stage with it in her hand. Kitty clung to Miss Marchmont, and her heart seemed dying within her.

"Oh! you said she did not care for him!" she gasped. "And yet you saw it all. Oh! what shall I do?—what shall I do?"

Miss Marchmont drew the curtains hurriedly in front of the box; and said, under her breath:

"Don't be absurd; don't make a scene; for people are looking this way already. And more than that, I am sure that Mr. Oliver saw us just now, and that he will be here directly."

She was not mistaken. The door of the box opened, and Mr. Oliver, pale with anger, stood before them. He bowed formally to Miss Marchmont, and offered his arm to Kitty. She took it without a word; for she was too unhappy to speak, and they left the box together. Miss Marchmont gazed after them with a look of blank dismay; then the ludicrous side of the incident struck her fancy, and laughing a little, she sat down again to watch the progress of the afterpiece.

Bitter words and angry reproaches passed between the married pair that night. The breach was too serious to be healed, the wound too deep to be forgiven. Before the morning dawned, they had separated, perhaps forever! And Francis Oliver was on his way to the continent, while Kitty, angry and resentful, still remained in their once happy home.

On the first evening after Mr. Oliver's departure, Kitty visited their most familiar haunt within the grounds of Gan Eden.

A few hasty words, spoken in the heat of pride and anger, had served to break the golden chain that bound them together.

No one could take the place of that lost friend—no one could be to her all that the lost lover had been.

This, then, was the end of all! Here her dreams of love must end with the ending of its reality—here all thoughts of happiness be laid down for ever! Ah, how differently she had pictured the fortune of the future, when Francis Oliver first wooed her for his bride. She leaned her head upon her hands, too worn out and bewildered, to weep. She thought of her mother's grave in the little hill-side churchyard at Brook, and then the deepest yearning of the sorrowful heart broke out:

"O mother! mother! why did you leave me? Why do you not come to comfort me now?"

It was a bitter hour—a hard struggle—a terrible lesson; but, after all, only the common one which every son of Adam and daughter of Eve must have by heart before they die.

Do I seem to dwell too long upon this shadowy portion of my "owen true tale"? Gladly would I make it more full of sunshine, but facts forbid. When those of whom I write linger long amid the tempest and the storm, what am I to do but linger there also, and faithfully trace each step that led them out once more to the light of day?

Wearily and sadly the summer days passed by.

Kitty was young and unused to pain—she had been treated harshly and unkindly, and resented that treatment as only a young and unbroken spirit could do. The discipline which should soften, and purify, and fit her for happiness could only come to her aid after much suffering and the lapse of years.

CHAPTER XII.

"Heedless of all, I wildly turned,
My soul forgot—nor, oh, condemn
That when such eyes before me burned—
My soul forgot all eyes but them!

"That moment did the mingled eyes
Of heaven and earth my madness view,
I should have seen, through earth and skies,
But you alone—but only you." —MOORE.

A deserted wife!

There is a whole history of sorrow, of danger, of temptation, and of sin in those three words, to an understanding eye. A woman, with all a woman's dangerous gifts of beauty, grace, and talent, her best feelings trampled upon, her love despised, is left to herself in a world that is full of pitfalls for the unwary, full of danger for us all. The privileges, the liberty of a wife are hers—hers, also, the privileges and the liberty of an independent single woman. Her position is so peculiar that the eyes of all are upon her—she is watched upon the right and upon the left, and being painfully conscious that what-

ever she says—or does—is almost certain to be misunderstood, she grows careless and defiant, and, in nine cases out of ten, takes her own way, regardless of the society which is so eager to chronicle her first false step. What else can be expected? I am not speaking of a good, of a "religious" woman, to whom such a trial would only come as an additional means of purification. I am speaking of a warm, undisciplined nature—of a proud and faulty heart—of Kitty's heart. She was a mere girl still—she was gay, beautiful, and high-spirited. Her first entrance into society had been a most successful one; she was followed, flattered, and petted by men and women whose simple notice would have been an honor to a queen. Therefore, when her husband, conscious of his own wrong-doing, and enraged at her knowledge of it, left her so suddenly and abruptly, what was the natural result of the rash action? Was she to shut herself up forever in the green recesses of "Gan Eden"? Miss Marchmont, it is true, counseled such a prudent retirement, but Kitty hated solitude, and answered, "No"! She went back among her friends, who welcomed her gladly. Enough was known of the quarrel and its cause to justify her in the eyes of the world, and for once women espoused the cause of a sister woman, and abused Mr. Oliver soundly, while they protected and encouraged his wife. Never had the parties been so pleasant—never had she met with such kindness from every one as now. She laughed at Miss Marchmont's warnings, threw open "Gan Eden" to her visitors, went to parties, operas, and balls without end, and took her pleasure bravely, without troubling her head with the proceedings of Mr. Oliver in France and Germany.

She loved him, it is true; but she was made up of pride as well as of affection, and he had wounded that pride to the quick by his public renunciation of her. Though she never saw him again on earth, she would not be the first to sue for a reconciliation. When Miss Marchmont undertook the part of mediator, she was surprised at the fund of resolution and obstinacy with which the young wife met her. There are some people who find it much more difficult to be forgiven than to forgive; and Kitty was one of them. If her husband chose to come and acknowledge his fault to her, she said, she might excuse it and welcome him back; but nothing on earth should ever induce her to make the first advance; she would die before she would do it! And there the matter rested, and two hearts pledged solemnly to each other at the altar, beat apart—anger, and hatred, and defiance blending with every unquiet throb.

And now I approach a very awkward—a very unpleasant part of my history. Kitty was one of those unfortunate creatures who, with the best intentions in the world, are perpetually getting themselves into serious scrapes, unless they are carefully watched over and tended by a faithful and constant guide. The poor child's manner was frank, free, and confiding; her heart was warm and generous, and always in need of something to love, and her nature was kind and sympathizing to a degree; and all these qualities, so good in themselves, combined together at this period, it would seem, to draw her on to misery and shame.

She had, as I have already said, Miss Marchmont for a near neighbor, as well as an intimate friend. But "Gan Eden" had two sides, and while the left wing overlooked the hospitable roof of the "Growlery", the right trenched closely upon the grounds of the "White Pines", a large and handsome villa, occupied by a returned East Indian, whose wealth was so fabulous that the children in the neighborhood were firmly imbued with the belief that he often breakfasted on melted pearls, and had diamonds and rubies served up, as a matter of course, each day with his dessert. His house in town was a perfect palace; his two country-seats were marvels of taste and display, while his villa, or "box", as he modestly called it, needed only the "roc's egg" of Aladdin's marvelous hall, to make it the eighth wonder of the world in Kit-ty's admiring eyes.

The East Indian was a childless widower, and being somewhat lonely in his splendid villa,

during one of his visits there, had amused himself with watching the movements of his neighbors in their pretty garden. Kitty's wild-rose face pleased him—some tone in her voice, some turn of her head or figure—reminded him of his long-buried wife, and he determined to make her acquaintance. This was easily done. To know Mr. Conyers, was, vulgarly speaking, a great "feather in one's cap", and when Mr. Oliver was told at a dinner-party one evening that the great man wished to be introduced to him, he went through the ceremony with a flutter of delight. His writings, no doubt, had attracted his attention!

"And where is Mrs. Oliver?" asked Mr. Conyers, after a moment's conversation.

The author answered indifferently that she was at home, and went on with other things. The great man lifted his eyebrows slightly as he talked. The next morning he called at "Gan Eden", and saw Kitty. From that day he was often at the house, and the first fruits and flowers from his forcing-houses and conservatories were always sent to her with his "love". Mr. Oliver laughed at his courtesy sometimes, and told Kitty that she ought to try hard for a place in the nabob's will; but he never tried to check the intimacy, and Kitty learned to associate most of her pleasures with the idea of the kind and good old man—especially after Mr. Oliver had left her. For then, no father could have been kinder to or more thoughtful for her than Mr. Conyers.

All this was very well. But from these simple and innocent causes, most extraordinary effects sometimes ensue. As in this case. Mr. Conyers took it into his head that Kitty must be dull by herself—that Miss Marchmont was too old and too literary to be a proper companion for her. Miss Marchmont would have felt infinitely obliged to him, had she known which way his thoughts were tending; but they were first revealed to her, as well as to every one else, by the apparition of a pretty, golden-haired, blue-eyed girl of seventeen, who was introduced at "Gan Eden" and the "Growlery" by the nabob, with no small pride, as "My niece, Louisa". My niece, Louisa, was a very good as well as a very pretty girl, but Miss Marchmont did not exactly take to her. Her ideas of literature were too vague—her ideas about crotchet-work and husbands too well defined to suit the authoress. But Kitty fell in love with her at first sight, and the fancy seemed quite mutual. At the end of a week's time, they were inseparable, and if you called the name of one, the other was pretty sure to come with her when she answered. Their styles of beauty and of dress were so utterly different, that there could be no rivalry between them, and they went out continually under the protection of Mr. Conyers, who was as fussy over them as if he had been an old hen with two chicks. Except during the first weeks of her marriage, I question if Kitty had ever been so happy in her life.

Into this small Eden, with its twin Eves, the serpent came at last. Kitty's new friend had one most dangerous fault—she had a brother! And this brother, a young officer in the Guards, was his uncle's acknowledged heir, and had, of course, sometimes to pay his respects at the "White Pines". He had been somewhat amiss in this duty till his sister came; for he hated the seclusion of the place, and missed the company of his brother officers and friends, whom he was never allowed to bring with him. But after he had paid one visit to his sister, and seen her new friend, it was wonderful how attentive a brother and nephew he became. Did Louisa wish to ride, to walk, to go to the opera, or to the play, it was always "dear George" who escorted her. Mr. Conyers and Mrs. Oliver, of course, joined the party. Then there were quiet family dinners at the "Pines", to which Mrs. Oliver was always invited, and which she never failed to attend. George was invariably present, and what so natural, as that when he gathered flowers for Louisa's hair and a bouquet in his uncle's conservatory, he should gather some for her friend at the same time? They were worn; splendid crimson blossoms, or pink, waxy buds, that set off Kitty's dark, bright

beauty well. Then came long strolls upon the lawn, and around the moonlit grounds, or quiet evenings in the library, when the young captain read aloud to the ladies as they sewed—or evenings full of music as a grape is full of wine, while Mr. Conyers slept placidly in his easy-chair, or as placidly surveyed the beautiful group, congratulating himself on the fact that not one among his neighbors or acquaintances had handsomer "young people" than he. Good, innocent man! he was so utterly unconscious all the while of the mischief he was helping on, that it was quite ludicrous to see.

Ah, me, how dangerous, and yet how sweet, such intimacies are! It is very wrong, I know, and so does every one else know, but it seems as if the slight consciousness of possible danger gives an added zest to these interviews. It is the seasoning that makes the peculiar charm of the dish!

It matters little what gives the first touch to the "electric chord" wherewith poor Byron declares we are bound. The most trifling thing can do it—a look, a word, a touch of the trembling hand—the perfume of a flower—a simple note of music—all these things may lift the veil, and make what was before but dimly guessed at, plain as the open day. It is dangerous work always, when two souls understand each other like this—and one of them is bound!

By degrees Kitty came to like the visitor, and to look far more eagerly than she would have confessed to herself or to any one else, for his coming. He was very much like his sister. He had the same peculiar delicacy of complexion, the same deep blue eyes, the same soft, golden hair. He was more than handsome—he was beautiful. And yet his six feet of stature, his broad shoulders, his heavy moustache, and his martial carriage, saved him from the charge of effeminacy. He was brave, too, as well as gentle. Louisa had told her friend of some of his exploits abroad, which he, himself, could never be induced to mention, and they all spoke well for his gallantry and his humanity. Kitty liked him none the less, believe me, that he had smelt powder, and faced a score of Russians, while he carried a wounded friend from the trenches at Sebastopol. She thought of him sometimes, exposed to that murderous fire, with a shudder of fear. What if one bullet had proved fatal? What if that golden head had been laid low? Ah, Kitty, Kitty—those were dangerous reveries of yours!

She had no intention of being unfaithful in word, thought, or deed, to her absent husband. But the constant companionship, the tender friendship, compared with the long absence, and the bitter estrangement, were not without their charms. She felt this, and excused it to herself in her more serious moments, by saying that she liked George Conyers for his sister's sake. He was like a brother to her—nothing more. When a young, beautiful, and lonely woman says that of a young, handsome, and disengaged man, we know only too well what it may possibly come in time to mean.

I would not be understood for a moment to hint at anything very wrong. These two were guarded by the most favorable circumstances from falling into any great sin. Their intimacy was sanctioned by those nearest and dearest to them—there was no obstacle in the way of their friendship, and even the world, however much it might gibe at such an intimacy in private, was forced, from the very nature of things, to be civil about the matter in public. Add to this that every thought of Kitty's heart would have shrunk from evil, and that the captain still retained enough of the boy about him to enable him to respect the woman he loved, and you will see that if they went headlong into ruin, they could not, at least, lay the blame, as too many are wont to do, upon the "circumstances" and the "fate" that led them on, and on, in spite of the struggles they continually made to escape.

At last, however, there came a time (that time always does come) when they read each others heart's more plainly than they had ever done before. They were riding one afternoon in a green, shady lane, with the deepest flush

and glory of a closing summer's day around and above them. Louisa was of the party, but her thoughts, at that moment, seemed to be very far away. The attendant groom lagged far behind, and Captain Conyers and Mrs. Oliver, riding side by side, had the conversation quite to themselves. At last it languished. There was a long silence. Louisa, still lost in thought, never looked toward the pair. George Conyers drew a long, deep breath.

"How beautiful it all is! And yet—I don't know why—it makes me feel sad."

Kitty smiled and sighed. The same vague, restless yearning was troubling both their hearts

"One feels so lonely on a day like this," he went on, in the same low tone. "One feels the need of close, warm ties to bind them to this lovely earth."

"You should marry," said Kitty, dreamily.

"Marry! I marry!"

Something in his tone startled her unaccountably. Their eyes met, and both turned crimson.

"No—I shall never marry," he said, slowly.

"At least—not—not as things are now."

Another long pause. Then Kitty faltered out, "Would it not be better?"

"Do you wish it? You of all women in the world. Do you wish me to marry?"

"Why not?" she murmured, looking everywhere except at him.

"Nay, answer the question fairly. If you wish me to marry, I will do so to-morrow. Do you?"

She ought to have said "Yes"—said it heartily and sincerely. Then he would have rushed off in a fit of pique, married the first woman who would have had him, and all would have been well. But Kitty could not tell a fib, and now that the question was put so pointedly, she knew that she did not wish it. She hated his possible wife already—at the bare thought of her existence. What—all those delicate attentions, those gentle words, those affectionate looks, to be given to another woman, and she left desolately and lonely once again! She could not bear that.

"Do you?" said the low voice; and the pleading sorrowful blue eyes looked deep into her own. "Katharine—do you wish it?"

A thrill ran over her at hearing that name, and from those lips. No one had ever called her Katharine before, and he who did it, seemed thus to make her peculiarly his own.

"No—I do not wish it," she said, so low that he could scarcely hear her. He bent in his saddle to listen, flushed up suddenly, and laid his hand on hers. She glanced toward Louisa, hurriedly, and cantered away. But that look—that clasp of the hand, had told her all!

CHAPTER XIII.

"You read it in my languid eyes,
And there alone should love be read;
You hear me say it all in sighs,
And thus alone should love be said.

"Then dread no more. I will not speak,
Although my heart to anguish thrill
I'll spare the burning of your cheek,
And look it all in silence still."

—MOORE.

What, then, is a woman to do in a case like this?

Of course, my dear lady, you are quite right in what you are about to say. There is but one thing which she can do with propriety, and that is, to break off so dangerous an acquaintance at once, and for ever.

But ah! as Fun so truly says, "It is not with uneducated people only, that ought stands for nothing." It is so very easy to talk of one's duty, and so very hard to fulfill it! And the plainest duty is generally the hardest.

Kitty knew as well as you or I, dear reader, that she ought to see the young captain no more. She said little to him during the remainder of that day; and at its close, when she was safe within her own little room at "Gan Eden," she thought soberly of all that had happened, and all that might happen if the intimacy was not checked.

There was danger. There were rocks and

breakers ahead. She saw them plainly at last, as she walked up and down the room, with her hands clasped behind her. Her friend was becoming something nearer—something dearer than a friend to her; and she was a wife, though a deserted one. Her lonely heart cried and pined for the sympathy and affection it saw so plainly within its reach, and she checked it sternly. She had been weak and wrong so far, but she would atone for her unconscious error on the spot. And under the influence of this resolution, she sat down at her desk and penned this note to the captain:

"You were wrong this afternoon. You must see and feel it by this time. And I think I must have done something wrong myself, or you never would have presumed so far. We ought never to meet again. And yet I love Louisa, and it would break my heart to give up my friend so suddenly. Do pray stay away from the villa for a little time, till you have quite forgotten this afternoon and—me."

KATHARINE."

She sent this note the next day by the hands of her own maid. There she committed a great blunder; for the woman, of course, supposed it must be a love-letter, and fancied she had got her mistress in her power. She had made other blunders in the note, as may be seen. She had acknowledged the existence of danger, and asked him to stay away, which was much; she had confessed that she could not give up his sister, and had signed herself Katharine, which was far more. In her short apprenticeship to the world and its people, she had learned many things, it is true, but she had many yet to learn. She would not have spelt affectionate with one "f" now, it may be; but she was as simple, as unable to disguise her feelings beneath the convenient veil of words, as she had been, when her serawl upon the title-page of her first gift made Francis Oliver smile. Wise as the serpent, Kitty was not, and might possibly never be, however much she might resemble the harmless dove. When Captain Conyers received this note, he seemed to be in ten different minds at once. To waylay Kitty in her walks and rides, to haunt her grounds, to scale her garden walls, these were only two or three of the mad projects that came into his head. At last he did the best thing for his cause, and the worst for hers, that he could possibly have hit upon. He went to town and staid there for a week, without sending her a line or message of any kind.

The first day, Kitty staid virtuously within doors, scarcely looking out of the window, lest she should see the captain. The second day passed in the same manner; but she grew cross for want of exercise, yawned all through the evening, scolded her maid, and went to bed in a desperately bad humor. The third day brought Louisa, full of wondering inquiries, and from her Kitty learned that the captain was in town. There was no need of vigilance, and all her trouble had been wasted, since the wolf was miles away from the sheepfold. She felt half angry at the thought.

On the fourth day, she rode out with Louisa; but the excursion was a dull one—the long, green lanes made Mrs. Oliver melancholy, and they came home at a very early hour. They dined together. In the course of the evening, several friends dropped in from town, and they had quite a gay party. At least, every one seemed to think it so, except Kitty, who was silent and absent, and evidently very much out of sorts. Some one sung "Robin Adair" that evening; and as the plaintive words fell upon her ear, so sad, and yet so applicable to her own thoughts at that moment, she felt as if she longed to hide her head and weep.

The fifth day was still worse; and on the evening of the sixth she sickened of her solitude, and accompanied Miss Marchmont to an artist's *soirée* at Brompton. As they passed down Piccadilly at a quick pace, she started back from the carriage-window with a faint exclamation.

"What is it?" asked Miss Marchmont, bending forward. "Anything run over. Any dog or horse hurt?"

"No," said Kitty, laughing in spite of herself. "I thought I saw some one I knew, that was all."

She had seen some one she knew. And that

some one was Captain Conyers, in full evening-dress, handing a beautiful young lady out of a carriage before the open door of one of those splendid mansions. Kitty's heart died within her at the sight; and it was far oftener before her eyes that evening than the pictures which the bearded artists placed upon the easel, one after another, for her inspection. A fair young girl, with brown hair and light blue eyes, dressed in azure satin and clouds of filmy lace; a tall handsome man bending over her with a glance of unmistakable devotion, and a pale and haggard woman in the background, regarding the scene with jealous eyes—little Kitty could have painted them a better picture with those slight materials than any they had there!

The seventh day came and went, and still no note or message from Captain Conyers. Kitty's pride began to come to her aid, and with pride came returning thoughts of right and duty. After all, why should she think so much about him—care so much for him? He was doing what she bade him—why should she reproach him for his obedience, in her secret heart? As she stood beside her garden-gate that morning, taking herself to task for her folly, a funeral-train passed in the direction of the parish-church. Her eyes followed the hearse wistfully. The time would surely come when she must be lying cold and still as that corpse was lying; and then, how small would all these vexations look, how bitterly would she lament that she knew the right, and did it not! Earthly things paled and faded as she gazed upon them by the broad light of eternity. She would do her duty while there was yet time. She would fly from this dangerous intimacy—these dangerous associations. I believe, if funeral processions passed us all every ten minutes in the day, we should behave much more wisely than we do now.

Kitty turned away from the gate and went into the house. She had decided upon a tour to the Lakes, and all that morning was spent in packing the things she wished to take with her. In the afternoon, she called at the "Growlery" to say good-bye. Miss Marchmont was in town, and not expected back for two or three days. She walked over to the "White Pines," made Louisa cry heartily by her strange manner and her stranger farewell; and, tearing herself away at last, almost by force, met Captain Conyers in the hall!

If there had not been so much at stake for both of them, it would have been too laughable. But neither of them seemed to view the unexpected meeting in a ludicrous light. Kitty turned pale—the captain turned crimson—then he offered her his arm.

"You must grant me five minutes' conversation where these prying servants cannot overhear every word," he said. "May I walk with you toward your home?"

She took his arm. As they left the house together, she felt frightened at the sense of peace and rest that suddenly filled her heart. All the wearying anxiety of the last week seemed to fade into nothing now that he was near her again, and kind as ever. She would hear what he had to say, and bid him farewell for ever—but not just then!

They had entered the grounds of "Gan Eden" before any of them spoke. He led her to the very pine-shaded glen in which she had sought refuge on the night of Mr. Oliver's departure; and, standing on the banks of the little brook, he took her hand and looked into her face. Did any vision of the New Forest and its singing stream—any remembrance of another friend, and another time, rise up before her eyes, at that moment? I fear not. The sudden meeting had so startled and unnerved her, that she was scarcely mistress of herself—scarcely able to remember where or what she was.

"Katharine," said the captain, "why did you write me that cruel letter?"

"Was it cruel? I did not mean it so. I only meant to tell you that we must meet no more."

"Why not?" he asked.

"You know as well as I."

"And yet you see that we have met. We must continue to meet all our lives long. Air,

earth, or ocean cannot hide you from me now, because I love you, and you know it."

She tried to free her hand from his, but he only held it closer still.

"No! You must hear me now; and then, if you like, I will never speak again upon this subject. Why do you object?"

"Why?" she said looking at him with surprise. "Am I not married? Have I any right to hear such language from any man? Oh, you know how wrong all this is! Do let me go, and never come here again till I am far away."

He dropped her hand.

"Go, then! But remember this—with you goes all that makes my life endurable; and if I am to lose you entirely, I will do my best to lose that life, too."

"Oh, how can you talk like that! Oh, I wish, with all my heart, that you had never met me!"

"I cannot echo that wish. Whatever you may make me suffer, I can never, for a single moment regret having known you."

"But what can I do to help you now? You know that I am married—"

"Yes—there is no need to remind me of that fact so often," he said, bitterly. "But, Katharine, if you will only listen to me a little while, I will show you how you can help me—how you can make a good and happy man of me."

"Tell me, then."

"Don't send me away from you. Let every thing go on as usual."

"How can you ask such a thing?"

"If you are thinking of what happened the other day, I assure you I will never repeat the offence. At that moment, and under those circumstances, I could not help speaking. Nor can I find it in my heart, now, to regret that I did so. Since you have known what you are to me, I have felt more at rest. Only, understand once for all, Katharine, that my life is yours, and I shall be content."

"But how can I accept such a sacrifice? I can give you nothing in return."

"I ask nothing."

"And for a mere friendly intercourse with me, can it be possible that you are willing to give up all nearer and dearer ties, all hopes of a happy home with some other woman?"

"I am quite willing."

"You must not do it. I cannot allow it. If you will only marry, I will still be your friend."

"Many thanks," was the sarcastic reply. "Perhaps, as you are so bent upon my marrying, you will select my wife?"

"Take the young lady I saw you with the other night."

The words came almost before Kitty knew what she was saying. It was too late to recall them, though she would have given worlds to do so.

"What young lady? Where did you see me?" he asked, eagerly.

"It was only a stupid jest of mine. Let us talk of other things."

"No; you must tell me. Where could you see me without my seeing you? With a young lady, too!"

"There was nothing so very wonderful in the matter," said Kitty, assuming an indifference she was very far from feeling. "I was going to Mr. —'s *soirée* with Miss Marchmont, and as we drove down Piccadilly, we happened to see you handing a young lady out of a carriage at the door of — House. So I recommended her to you, but only in jest."

If he had laughed at that moment, he would have spoiled everything. But he looked as grave as a judge when he met her penetrating glance.

"It was Miss Stainforth," he said, quietly. "She is my cousin, and thinks me good enough to hand her from her carriage; but as for anything more, why she is engaged to Lord R——, and is to be married in three months from this time."

Kitty drew a long breath. Was she relieved at hearing this piece of news? Who shall say?

"Well," she said, more cheerfully; "if Miss Stainforth is disposed of, there are plenty of young ladies still in the market, I think, and you should try your fortune there."

"Are you serious?"

"Quite."

"You spoke so differently the other day."

"But I have been thinking since. And if we are to continue friends, you certainly ought to marry. It would put the intimacy on a safe and pleasant footing at once. Even if I were differently situated—if Mr. Oliver were here—it would do so. You could then visit us as a friend of the family—his friend as well as mine. But while you are a single man, and I am a deserted wife, you will forgive me if I say, that I think the less we see of each other the better it will be for both of us."

"This is too much!" he burst out, angrily. "Katharine, you do not understand me. You take me for a mere man of the world, and imagine that I have some sinister design in prosecuting this friendship. God knows, my darling, I would rather die than injure a single hair of your head!"

"I believe that!" she said, softly.

"Yet still you fancy I look forward to some reward for my 'sacrifice', as you persist in calling it. What sacrifice do I make? I don't want to marry unless I can marry you. If I had seen you before Mr. Oliver, I would have done my best to win you for my wife. He came first: he holds you still. That, of course, I cannot alter. I wish him no harm. I do not speculate or build upon his death. I simply say, that if, at any future time, you should be left alone in the world—more really alone than you are now, I should claim you as my own, if you would let me. In the meantime, no other woman shall fill your place in my home and heart. If it is fated that we are never to be more than friends to each other, so let it be; but I shall still be faithful to you. So that I see you sometimes—hear you speak—get one kind word from those dear lips—one kind look from those gentle eyes, it is enough. I will ask for nothing more. And you can surely grant so much without harming yourself or me. I ask you to do nothing wrong, Katharine—only to show a little mercy to a poor, forlorn wretch, who has nothing but you on earth—nothing to love—nothing to hope for."

His voice died away in a sob, and Kitty's eyes were full of tears.

"Oh! how much you must love me!" she said, simply.

"You are right, my darling. I love you far better than I do myself; and I ask so little to make me happy. You will not refuse it, Katharine?"

"No."

He pressed her hand to his heart—to his lips—to his tearful eyes, and then resigned it.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Upon a summer afternoon,
A wee before the sun gaed doon,
My lassie, in a braw new goun,
Cam' o'er the hills to Gowrie.
The rosebud tinged with morning shower,
Blooms fresh within the sunny bower,
But Katie was the fairest flower
That ever bloomed in Gowrie."

—SCOTCH SONG.

Kitty, overpowered by her own conflicting feelings, and the strangeness of her situation, received this first overt act of homage on the part of the captain in passive silence.

"There," said he, "that is my first and my last caress. Oh, this is Heaven, indeed, after the torture of last week! I could not keep away any longer; I should have come to you at all risks this afternoon."

"And I should have been far away—far on my journey to the lakes."

"What was sending you there?"

She smiled and shook her head.

"You were going to get out of my way?"

"I was."

"You have saved me a long journey, for I should have followed you by the very next train."

"How foolish!"

"Perhaps—but I cannot help it. Ah, you will never know the feeling I have toward you, Katharine. I could work gladly as a servant in yonder house, if I could be near you in no other way."

"Well, there will be no need of that if you

keep your promise. But, oh! remember how far I am trusting you! If you should fail me."

"You need not fear. Only say a kind word to me now and then, and I will lie down contented. This blessed calm! This sweet repose! Katherine, it has been dearly purchased; but I do not regret the agony now."

"You will not let your sister know," said Kitty, after a pause.

"Of course not. No one need ever know except our two selves. Trust to me, Katherine, and you will find that all these fears are quite needless and groundless. All will go on as usual, except that we shall be happier, and with a happiness that the world would never understand."

"Well, I must go now," she said, sighing.

"When shall I see you again?"

"I cannot tell."

"You must dine at the 'Pines' to-day. I shall send Louisa over for you. Will you promise?"

"Yes."

"And after dinner you shall sing me some of those old ballads that I love so well; and then, for a reward, I will read some poetry to you."

"Very well."

"You say that so listlessly, so sadly. What ails you, my darling?"

"I scarcely know. But I feel in my heart that this sort of formal arrangement which we have entered into is all wrong. O George—I wish we had never met!" And the poor child burst into a flood of bitter tears.

The young captain looked perplexed and almost angry as she spoke. He had been taking great credit to himself for having asked so little from her, and, looking upon life simply as a thing to be enjoyed as much as possible: he could not appreciate or understand those finer instincts of right and wrong which troubled Kitty so. So long as he committed no overt act of sin, he could not see why this intimacy should end; and he was half inclined to rebuke her for her scruples more sharply than she might have liked. But her tears melted him, and he flung himself at her feet in an agony of remorse and grief.

"For Heaven's sake don't cry, Katharine," he exclaimed. "Don't shed one tear for me, I am not worth it! If this really makes you so uneasy and unhappy, I will go away to-day, and never ask to see you again—never write to you—anything—everything, rather than see you suffer!"

She smiled sadly upon him through her tears.

"I fear it is too late now, George," was all she said, as she turned away.

He walked as far as the house porch with her. Kitty's maid, passing through the hall just as they bade each other good bye, looked out through the glass door, and drew her own conclusions as to the relations existing between them. It was not her place to speak of such things, however, except in the servants' hall. And there, I can assure you, she made good use of her tongue, and a conclave of servants sat solemnly discussing the affair with closed doors below, while their mistress brooded over it in the silence of her chamber, and the captain chewed the same bitter cud of reflection as he smoked his cigar upon the lawn before his uncle's house.

"All wrong—all wrong!" Yes, it was quite true—that pathetic exclamation of Kitty's. She stood upon the brink of a fearful gulf, and saw its black depths dimly through her half-averted eyes. Yet, surely, they were not so hopeless or so near. Surely the brink was not yet crumbling beneath her feet! She had no thought of wrong—the attachment was innocent enough in itself, only one which "the world would not understand". Fair young reader, as you pause upon this page, let me whisper one word of warning in your ear. Beware always of things which the world will not understand. They are, generally, also things from which the angels would vail their grieving eyes—things which (speaking of them in that sense) the inhabitants of heaven would no more "understand" than would the unmerciful and uncharitable dwellers upon this lower earth.

...Kitty dined that day at the "White Pines".

The quiet evening which the captain looked forward to was, however, spoiled by the unexpected advent of some friends from town, who, finding her absent, and being on intimate terms with Mr. Conyers, took the liberty of following her to his house. Louisa and her uncle welcomed them most gladly. Kitty at least seemed to do so, and the captain waxed exceeding wroth as he watched her talking away with the greatest apparent interest to a young author, who was his own especial abhorrence.

"I should like to punch the fellow's head for him!" he muttered to himself, as he watched the pair. What business has he to look straight into her eyes like that? And now he has taken her fan—confound his impudence! Queer taste she must have, too—but I suppose it is because he writes. Any fellow that can hold a pen properly, and do more than make his mark with it, seems to interest her at once, or else—which I am more than half inclined to believe—she is like all the rest of her sex, and likes the last comer best. They are flirting, fickle things, these women, make the best of them."

Having come to this sage conclusion, the captain devoted himself with might and main to a pretty little literary widow, who had the reputation of being the most fascinating and faithless creature in London. They were getting on famously together, when the captain, looking across to where Kitty sat, caught her eyes fixed upon him with a very peculiar expression. How long she had been watching him, he could not say; but there was a smile of surprise and scorn playing around her lip that stung him to the quick. He turned scarlet—got up hurriedly—made some excuse to his pretty friend, and walked away. Katharine's contempt was not precisely the reward he wished to earn.

He saw no more of her that evening, for she went home early. But, after the company had returned to town, his sister told him a piece of news which was anything but agreeable. An *impromptu fête* had been arranged between Kitty and her friends. "Gan Eden" was to be thrown open and filled with guests the very next day, and La Stella, the great singer, was to be induced to honor the festival with her presence. At that piece of intelligence the captain fumed and fretted more than ever.

But, in spite of him, the *fête* took place; and, what was more, he went to it. Like most *impromptu* things, it was a decided success. The guests were in their best humor and best attire. The day was pleasant—the sun descended to shine—the repast upon the lawn was perfect in its way, and La Stella first sang like a nightingale in the house, and then indulged her particular friends with a ballad in the open air. As they gathered around her, jesting and laughing, after the song was over, the captain, standing moodily apart pulling his tawny mustache, saw a little white hand laid upon his arm. Its owner was Kitty, who stood beside him, radiant in rose-colored muslin, smiling and happy as her guests.

"Sir Knight of the Doleful Countenance," she said, playfully, "why are you moping here? Is there nothing in this pleasant scene—these pleasant faces, to make you glad?"

He muttered something behind his mustache about "public singers", and confounded folly.

Kitty's face changed.

"La Stella's presence is an honor to me—to us all," she said, proudly. "You know that as well as I do. And for the rest—cannot you guess why this *fête* was planned?"

"That I am sure I cannot."

"What if I had reason to believe our intimacy was remarked—commented upon?"

"Who dares?" he cried, flushing up.

"Hush! Don't make a Don Quixote of yourself for nothing. People are talking about us, and will continue to do so, if we are so constantly together, and alone."

"We are never alone."

"Louisa and your uncle count for nothing in the eyes of the world. And, as I cannot afford to lose my good name, even for your sake, George, I have opened the gates of Gan Eden once more to all comers. As one of a crowd I may surely notice you without coming to grief thereby."

"I am exceedingly obliged to you," was his curt reply. "If you think I am going to be noticed only as one of the crowd, you are vastly mistaken."

Kitty laughed mischievously.

"George, how is it that men are always polite to every woman except the women they care most for? When you first knew me, you would not have dreamed of being so rude."

"Don't laugh at me, Katharine. I'm miserable; I cannot bear it."

"Then don't be such a bear. Come, de friends once more."

He grasped the hand she held out, and was about to speak; but she snatched it away, and took refuge by the side of Miss Marchmont, who made one of the group clustering around La Stella upon the lawn. They were rallying the actress unmercifully upon some stage-blunder which she had made two years before at her *début*, and she was laughing as heartily as the rest at its memory.

"Ah, one grows wiser as one grows older," she remarked. "I should not do that, now. I should not do many things to-day that I did then," she added, with a momentary overshadowing of her bright, fair face.

"For instance?" suggested Miss Du Bois, a young lady-artist of no mean fame, who was a personal and intimate friend of the singer.

La Stella looked at her and smiled.

"You should not ask questions, or tell tales out of school," was all the reply she vouchsafed to make.

"Only one—just one. I have kept the secret three whole days. Do take pity on me, and let me divulge it now."

"As you please," said La Stella, laughing.

"You give me leave?"

"Certainly. I know of no secret in which I am concerned which you can possibly get hold of."

"Remember, you have consented," said the mischievous girl, bursting with laughter. "Ladies and gentlemen, attention! La Stella is an exquisite singer, a splendid actress, as you know; but she is also something more which you do not know. She is a full fledged—"

"Rose!" exclaimed the singer, in sudden terror.

"Authoress!" cried Miss Dubois, joyously, before she could finish the sentence she had commenced.

CHAPTER XV.

"You tell me that my face is fair—
It may be sae, I dinna care—
But ne'er again gar't blush so sair
As ye had done afore folk.
Behave yoursel' before folk,
Behave yoursel' before folk,
Nor heat my cheeks wi' your mad freaks,
But aye be douce before folk."

—OLD SONG.

At this announcement, all eyes were turned upon the singer.

"It is true, I assure you," persisted Miss Du Bois. "I was in her dressing-room the other morning, and found a most suspicious-looking little roll upon her toilet-table, which I took the liberty of peeping at; and I give you my word, it was a genuine manuscript, ready for the printer."

"If that is the case, Rose, I shall take very good care how I let you into my dressing-room again," said La Stella, laughing; but, at the same time, looking as if she felt very much inclined to box her friend's unfortunate ears.

The conversation dropped, and the group around La Stella broke up and went their several ways. Kitty, left almost alone with her guest, was wondering timidly how she ought to address her, when La Stella opened the conversation herself, and in a most unexpected way.

"My dear Mrs. Oliver," she said, "I wish to speak to you a moment, and quite alone, if I may."

"Certainly," said Kitty, looking not a little bewildered. "We are quite alone here."

"Yes; and don't be offended with my first question. Have you heard from your husband very lately?"

"Not for several months," replied Kitty.

looking quite as angry as she felt. "Pray, why do you ask?"

The emphasis laid upon the pronoun made La Stella smile.

"Forgive me," she said, gently. "I fear you think me very rude; but I have only your welfare at heart all the while. I ask, because common report has blamed me for his departure, and most falsely. Dear Mrs. Oliver, I assure you that I never spoke to him off the stage in my life."

"So I have been told," said Kitty, gloomily.

"I had no more to do with his goings or comings than the winds that blow. I came here to-day purposely to tell you this."

"You were very kind," replied Kitty, still without looking up.

La Stella eyed her a few moments in silence. A kind smile played around her lips. Suddenly she took both the young wife's hands in hers.

"Come," she said, "let us be friends. I have felt much interested in you ever since I heard the particulars of this story; I am not in the habit of accepting invitations at a day's notice, as you may guess; but when my friends told me where they wanted me to go, I canceled all my other engagements instantly, so that I might see you. Cannot you confide in me, dear Mrs. Oliver, now that I am here?"

Kitty was obstinately silent.

"I see," said the singer, sadly, as she dropped her hand, "you have other friends who are more to you than I can ever be. You have, perhaps, some prejudice against me on account of my profession, and you cannot forget it. Well, I will go."

She was rising from her seat, but Kitty's hand detained her.

"Stay! Don't think me cold or unkind. This is so unexpected that I hardly know how to answer you. I need a friend, La Stella—believe me, I do."

"I see it, I know it, I feel it. I can be that friend to you, if you will let me."

Kitty's mute answer was a kiss, and they sat in silence for a time.

"You see," Kitty began, at last, "it was hard to be deserted, even though I was deserted for no other woman. I am very proud—I could not bear that people should think me quite unable to win or keep a heart."

"I quite understand that," said La Stella. "It is hard to be deserted. I have felt it myself."

"You!"

"Yes, I!"

"So beautiful—so gifted—so famous."

"Then I was neither of the three. I had no gone upon the stage. I was only a peasant maiden, singing my simple songs in my native valley. The man I loved found me there. He was struck with my voice; he took me away and defrayed all the costs of my education till I could sing almost as well as I can now. I owed that man everything—everything! Was it strange that I learned to love him? And he loved me, too, for a time, and I was to have been his wife."

She passed her hand hastily across her eyes, and went on.

"He was an Englishman, and the death of his father compelled him to return to his home for a time. He left me with my mother. He was to return for me before the year expired; but, Mrs. Oliver, before the time was over, he had married another. I see him often now," she went on, with a bitter laugh: "he comes with his wife to the opera every time I sing. She is a duke's daughter, and as beautiful as a dream. I do not say that I blame him; but my position was not a pleasant one at first."

"How strange!" said Kitty. "If I had been asked to point out a thoroughly happy person, I should have selected you."

"Ah! every heart knows its own bitterness; and perhaps those whom we fancy the most free from care are those most deeply bowed down beneath its heavy hand," said La Stella, musingly. "None but God can know who is really happy upon this earth."

"But I heard that you were about to be married," said Kitty.

"So I am," was the quiet reply. "One can scarcely afford, in these enlightened days, to waste a whole life, as well as a whole heart, upon a dream. I shall marry Signor — very soon. I have known him for several years; he is the gentlest and most amiable of men, and I hope to be very happy with him. The first freshness and glory of life has gone, but enough remains to make it worth my while to dare the venture. You will come to my wedding, will you not, my dear Mrs. Oliver?"

"Yes."

"And now that I have told you so much of myself, can you guess why?" asked the singer, looking straight into Kitty's eyes. They fell, with a troubled expression, before the searching glance.

"No. If you had any particular reason for telling me this, I cannot guess it."

"I had three, Mrs. Oliver. First, to show you that I was not to blame for your husband's departure; secondly, to let you see that I had suffered what you suffered when he went; and, thirdly—now, you must not be angry—I told you my history in order that I might speak more freely of your own. Do you understand me now?"

"Speak out, La Stella. Say frankly what you wish to say."

"I will, and it is this: Bitter as the lot of a deserted wife may be, there is a lot more bitter still—that of a guilty one!"

There was a long pause. The red blood mounted slowly Kitty's temples. At last she looked up and said, haughtily:

"Why do you say this to me?"

"Because you are human and a woman," was the courageous reply. "Because he who should have guarded you from every danger has left you to the worst fate that can befall you. Because another, who has no right to do so, loves you dearly. And because, in some unhappy moment, you may turn to that love for consolation. For all these reasons I speak. I should be no true friend if I held my peace."

"Yes," said Kitty, with a slight smile; "you are quite right. Deserted though I am, I am still beloved!"

"There lies the danger!" cried La Stella, with passionate warmth. "Oh, do anything—suffer anything, rather than keep that thought in your mind."

"But if it comforts me?"

"So much the worse. Crush it—kill it while you can!"

"You misunderstand the whole thing; so I do not mind telling you that what you say is true. But the attachment to which you allude is so pure, that its very purity alone is the joy and consolation of my lonely life."

"Poor child!—poor child! But will it be always so?"

"Why should it not?"

"It might—if you were both angels. As it is, I have very serious doubts. And I beg, most earnestly, that you will let my advice have some weight with you. I beg that you will give the acquaintance up."

But Kitty only smiled in answer to this affectionate prayer.

"Do you know what is said of it among your friends?" asked La Stella.

"No."

"It is already commented upon very freely. Some call it infatuation on your part; others give it a harsher name."

"How can they talk so?" cried Kitty, with tearful eyes; "and of me!"

"My dear, have you given them no reason?"

"I have done nothing wrong."

"God forbid that you ever should, my dear Mrs. Oliver! But if a saint lived upon this earth, and gave the slightest cause for scandal, there would be plenty who would seize upon it eagerly enough. Your case is no harder than that of a thousand others. You have meant no harm, but you have placed yourself in an equivocal position, and people are only too ready to take advantage of it."

"It is very unkind of them, I am sure," sobbed Kitty. "I never harmed any one in my

life, and why should they say such dreadful things of me?"

La Stella sighed at the hopeless task before her. Kitty could not, or would not, see that she herself had been to blame. She fancied, because she was innocent, that the whole world must be aware of the fact, and could not understand that people might take away her character gayly, in the course of a morning call, without feeling the least atom of ill-will toward her personally. She listened, it is true, while the singer talked; but she felt injured and oppressed by every word that fell from her lips, and was heartily glad when the interview came at last to an end.

"Well, you are warned," said La Stella, rising from her seat. "And now that the ice is broken between us, perhaps you will not mind talking to me about this from time to time. Whenever you wish my advice or my assistance, it is yours. Will you remember this?"

"I will, most gladly."

"And we are friends?"

"Always."

"That is well. Now, adieu for the present."

She kissed her again as she said good-bye, and soon after left Gan Eden in company with Miss Du Bois and Miss Marchmont, at whose house they were to dine.

Captain Conyers, who had watched from afar the long interview with La Stella, came up with a dismayed face as soon as she had gone, and, gently insinuating himself into her vacant place, asked, in his softest voice, what she had been talking about. But Kitty positively snubbed him. It is a shocking thing to have to relate of one's heroine, but she was undeniably and unmistakably cross; and the gallant captain had made his advance at a most unlucky time.

"What can it possibly be to you?" she asked, as she sprang up from her seat. "I don't know that I am obliged to account to you for every word I speak and every thought I think—as yet. If you wish to know what we were saying, you had better go and ask La Stella herself before she leaves the grounds."

And she shook out her pink flounces and walked away, leaving him to pull his blonde moustache, and mutter to himself after his favorite fashion:

"By Jove! what a temper she has got of her own. I wonder what La Stella has been lecturing her about? A lecture it was, I am sure; for both their faces were as long as my arm, and once I thought I saw Katharine crying. Confound that singer! If she was a man, I would call her out before sunset. What can be up?"

Ah! captain, conscience was "up"—pride was "up", and dignity, and vanity, and folly, and coquetry, and jealousy, for the moment, were "down". Never was his chance of success so small as at that moment. If it only could have lasted forever!

CHAPTER XVI.

"Yet oft, in his marble hearth's bright glow,
He watched a picture come and go;
And sweet Maud Muller's hazel eyes
Looked out in their innocent surprise.
And the proud man sighed, with a secret pain,
'Would that I were free again;
Free, as when I rode that day,
Where the barefoot maiden raked her hay.'"

—JOHN G. W. WHITTIER.

It is not to be supposed that while Kitty and her friends were at "high jinks" in England, Mr. Oliver, in Paris, remained entirely in ignorance of her doings. There are always plenty of people who are only too glad to enlighten an absent husband or wife as to the proceedings of the "half" they have left behind them. Good-natured Mrs. Grundys, at second-floor windows, or garden-gates, are eager to watch and report all they hear or see; and loungers at the clubs (those hot-beds of scandal, where reputations are torn so freely to tatters, that it is a wonder any of us have a rag left) spend half their useless lives in getting their friends into hot water, by means of the scandalous reports and foolish tittle-tattle which pass current there. One of these hatted and booted old gossips thought proper to acquaint Mr. Oliver with

some little circumstance which he could not be supposed to know; and, by that discreet act, brought matters to a focus with the most praiseworthy rapidity.

Mr. Oliver, just before that letter was received, was sitting in his *salon* at the hotel in Paris, in a most desponding mood. Although it was the height of summer, the day was dull, dark, cold, and dreary. The rain fell in a steady, hopeless downpour. Nothing but the roofs and fronts of stone houses could be seen from his high window. Nothing was to be heard but the roll of *facades*, and the street-cries that fell so harshly upon his English ears. The room where he was sitting was resplendent with green and gold; with paneled, painted walls, half a dozen mirrors, and twice that number of fancifully decorated clocks, not one of which agreed with the other as to the flight of "the enemy". The sofa on which he lounged was elegantly carved; the cushions of the softest damask, and the footstool, just before it, of green velvet, embroidered with gold. Upon the marble hearth a wood-fire snapped and crackled cheerfully, and the fir cones, piled upon the logs, diffused a pleasant odor through the room. Upon the table, at his right hand, stood a breakfast service of white porcelain, flanked by exquisitely white rolls, a plate of ham garnished with sprigs of green, and a dish of fruit temptingly served up in its own leaves. Taste, luxury, and comfort everywhere; and in the hand of the lounger his beloved Times. What more could an Englishman desire?

Yet Mr. Oliver looked and felt strangely dissatisfied with it all. He ate his breakfast surly, grumbled over the leading article, pished and pshawed at the state of the money-market, and finally flung himself down upon the sofa in a wretched state of depression. An Englishman suffering from a fit of the blue-devils is, to me, at once the most pitiable and the most ludicrous object in existence; an American in such a plight may manage, by putting an unwonted spice of energy into his movements, to work it off; a Frenchman will laugh, sing, or dance it away; but Johnny Bull, attacked by the universal enemy, lies down incontinently, so ridiculously miserable, so comically cross, that he becomes, indeed, a spectacle for gods and men!

Suffering under this national disease, the author's thoughts turned longingly from the cold splendor of that gilded *salon* to the snug parlors, the cheerful grounds of his own English home; and Kitty, with her wild-rose face, the pretty peasant-girl whom he had won for his bride, and who had adored her new station so well; how gently, how tenderly he thought of her! His brief passion for La Stella had perished for want of aliment. She had scorned, but Kitty had always loved him. He forgot, "as of a sudden the image, with all its old dearness, rose visibly before his mind"; he forgot how he had tired of the heart he had won; how tame home-scenes and domestic pleasures had seemed to him after their first novelty was over; he forgot his own coldness and carelessness, his own selfishness, his own rudeness where his wife had been concerned; he remembered only her youth, her beauty, her grace, and her love for him, and fancied his late tenderness might make amends for all that had passed.

"I suppose I must eat humble-pie for once in my life just at present," he muttered to himself. "I shall have to ask her pardon, swear that she is prettier than a thousand La Stellas, vow upon my knees that I love her better than ever, and then we shall be very happy again, and go on all the better for this little tiff."

Perhaps he was right; for women are the most credulous of created beings where the man they have once truly loved is concerned. Other suitors might find it somewhat difficult to explain or excuse a temporary infidelity, but the "king can do no wrong", and when the one love returns to his allegiance he is only too gladly welcomed. So it was quite possible that Mr. Oliver's dream of the future might be realized—that he and Kitty might descend into the vale of years as true a Darby and Joan as ever existed. But that blundering old busybody at the club had changed this possibility into an impossibility, and altered the lives and destinies

of both; and the *garcon* entered at this moment bearing a letter for "Monsieur"—the letter which the modern Paul Pry had been at the trouble to pen. It ran thus:

"MY DEAR FELLOW:—'Forewarned is forearmed', so the old adage says, and I have been thinking for some weeks past that I ought to quote it to you. The fact is, matters are getting serious, and some one ought to tell you how they stand. I mention no names, in case of this letter falling into other hands. I merely beg to say, that if a man has a young and pretty wife, he ought not, in my humble opinion, to leave her by herself for months at a time. Being, as it were, deserted, she may think proper to console herself, for instance, by receiving the attentions of a very handsome young captain in the Guards. Women have done such things before now, as I suppose you know.

"If I had a friend in this predicament, I should say to him: 'Come home and look after your wife, my good fellow, before it is too late!' There is no use in shutting the stable-door, etc. A word to the wise is sufficient. Good-bye, my dear fellow, and believe me, yours sincerely,

T. H. J."

One can imagine the state of mind into which the reception of this precious epistle threw Mr. Oliver. All tender thoughts of home and of his wife vanished at the sight of the first line, and by the time he had finished its perusal, he was almost frantic.

"Laughed at—sneered at by all London!" he cried, stamping upon the letter. "Old J would never have written till it came to that! And this is the woman I raised from a peasant's village to share my home! She is ready to desert me, and follow the first scarlet-coated idiot who says a dozen flattering words in her ear! She exchanges her humble name for one well known and respected, only to make it a bye-word and a reproach for ever!"

You perceive, dear reader, that our friend was, for the moment, only fit to be classed with the associates of Lord Dundreary; who (if we may believe that sapient nobleman's statements), are all "lunatics". Mr. Oliver was speaking unconsciously as if he had been a scion of some royal house, or else the greatest author the world had ever known. He was, in reality, a man of no particular family—a clever, but not a famous author; yet, if he had had "all the blood of all the Howards" in his veins, and wielded the pen of Shakspeare or of Milton, he could not have fancied himself more deeply wronged.

"A farmer's daughter! A poor, unlettered peasant-girl!" he kept ejaculating, as he paced up and down the room.

As if her being the daughter of a titled earl would have made the trouble lighter, the disgrace less deep and humiliating! But Mr. Oliver "dearly loved a lord"—far more dearly than he loved Kitty. While a man can remember anything to the disadvantage of a woman—while he can say to himself, "She lacks beauty, grace, wealth, intellect"—he does not love her. While he can compare her with others to her disadvantage, while he can regret a charm which she does not possess—while he can prefer his own ease or enjoyment to hers, while he can hesitate at any sacrifice, no matter how great, for her dear sake—it may be affection, attachment, esteem that he feels for her, but it is not love! That sweet madness, when it seizes hold upon a heart, purges it of all else except itself. Ruin, poverty, danger, and disgrace—they are as nothing while the being, fairer, and better, and more beautiful than anything else on earth, smiles on. How many people in the world do you suppose are capable of feeling such a passion? Women sometimes feel it, but far less frequently, I imagine, than they have credit for doing—men, rarely, or never! Six women out of ten will probably balance the "pros and cons" when they fancy themselves in love; but eleven men and a half out of twelve, will certainly do so. It is quite as well for the world that this is so. These frenzy fevers rarely fail to disturb the equilibrium of society—rarely fail to destroy the balance of right and wrong. The only case I can at this moment recall to mind, is a case in point. Look at Lord Nelson. He was ready to ruin himself for a woman; but for his superhuman bravery, it is possible that he might have done so! (I speak only of outward ruin—of ruin that the world acknowledges—not of that inner destruction which God sees and remembers.) How disastrous was that love!

What a constant struggle and agony must life have been to those unhappy beings! There was another soldier too, before him, who gave the world for a woman's smile, and considered it well lost. Was Antony the happier therefor! No—depend upon it, the general way is far the best. We only come to deeper grief by these deep passions. It is far better to go through life as most of us do, playing with the shadow of love rather than falling into the burning grasp of its dread reality. Better, far, to feel that reasonable devotion which admits of diurnal mutton-chops, and porter, and cigars, and does not interfere with sound sleep and early rising, than to undergo the misery of that wilder passion that pants, pale and sleepless, beneath the stars, through a dreary waste of years. Calm attachments, quiet domestic joys—these suit our placid, sensible England best.

Mr. Oliver, loving Kitty only in this general way, and valuing his treasure the less because it was his own, could yet feel terribly indignant when any rash hand was stretched out to take it from him. He devoted that unlucky captain in the Guards to the vengeance of more gods than ever existed in the heathen mythology—he would start by the next boat for England, and "have it out with him", etc. In this mood he left his hotel, to make preparations for his immediate departure. But as it generally happens that when there is any vital necessity for our leaving a place instantly, something occurs to delay us, so it chanced that one or two vexing little things combined to keep our author in Paris till the end of that week. His banker was out of town for a few days—something was wrong with his passport, and an obliging emperor had not then dispensed with such latch-keys to "La Belle France". Consequently, there was no resource left him, except to swear a little, and then wait patiently.

He improved the opportunity by writing a fierce philippic to his wife. There again he showed a lamentable ignorance of woman's nature, which he was accustomed to boast had been his peculiar study so long, that he could trace every action and thought of the pretty dears to its hidden source. As if any one—even the woman herself—ever yet understood a woman! The Sphinx is a riddle to the Sphinx, what then must she be to those who gaze with curious eyes upon her? If Mr. Oliver had said: "My dear Kitty, mischievous people have been trying to prejudice me against you, but I don't believe one word they say, and am coming home by the next steamer to tell you so, and to say that I love you!" the matter would have been settled at once. She would have received him with open arms. But in the place of this brief and sensible epistle, he wrote one of eight pages, wherein he charged her with nearly every crime in the calendar except murder and arson, and wound up with the assurance that she had proved herself so utterly incapable of behaving with propriety, he should at once withdraw the liberal allowance he had made her, and compel her to reside where and with whom he pleased.

Some women will forgive injuries, infidelities, unkindnesses, slights, neglects, insults—nay, even blows and curses; but there are very few who can forgive meanness, unless they are mean themselves; or if, by any chance, they are so wrought upon by considerations of charity and duty as to forgive—they will not, because they cannot forget. To Kitty, especially, this weakness (vice she called it) was abhorrent. She had been accustomed to say in her own energetic fashion, that a mean man was capable of committing any crime; in fact, that he had committed all crimes simply by being mean.

Money, in her inexperienced eyes, was simply a golden medium of comfort and happiness. To see any one niggardly in its distribution gave her pain—to be stinted herself in its enjoyment after she had once tasted it, was torture. Consequently, it happened that as she read that insulting letter, though her cheek burned and her heart beat high at every galling word, she felt that in some faint measure she had perhaps deserved them, and so held her peace. But when she came to the end, she sprang from her seat as if the absent writer had struck her.

"He taunts me with my dependence upon him!" she cried out, turning deadly pale with rage and shame. "He dares to taunt me with it, and to make it the means of my humiliation. He is right. I am dependent—to my shame be it said. With these two strong hands that were used to work once, though they look so dainty now—with these two active, ready feet—with this healthful young frame full of life and energy. I have sat down in idleness, and eaten of that man's bread, drank of his cup, till he taunts me with the fact! Before I give him reason to say those words again," she cried, with sudden savage energy, lifting her hands on high, "I will beg, starve, die in the streets!"

It was not a model speech I grant; but mine is no model heroine. "Only a woman"—young, passionate, and faulty to a degree. "Only a woman" who felt in some way that she had been wronged, and made this declaration, which sounded in the silence, as solemn as an oath. Kitty sat down at her writing-desk. What did she do? Oh, only what all my principal characters have been doing for some time back; just the very thing she ought not to have done. She wrote a note to Captain Conyers.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Oh, for ane and twenty, Tam,
And hey, sweet ane and twenty, Tam!
I'll learn my kin a rattlin' sang,
An I saw ane and twenty, Tam!"

—BURNS.

Before she had finished sealing and directing the letter, Miss Marchmont entered the room. She was in walking costume, held an open note in her hand, and was about to speak, when the name upon Kitty's envelope caught her eye. She colored up, and then drew a chair close beside the writing-desk, and laid her hand upon the letter.

"My dear, will you forgive me if I say something that will sound very impudent? Don't send that note."

"Why not, pray?" asked Kitty, turning crimson, and putting on a defiant look.

"I came here this morning on purpose to talk to you about him. Look at this, which I received only half-an-hour ago."

She laid her own letter before Kitty, whose eye was first caught by these words:

"Do persuade that pretty little friend of yours, Mrs. Oliver, to make herself a little less conspicuous with Captain Conyers. He is not worthy to lace her slippers—a mere empty-headed fop, with no ideas beyond a uniform and his military duties. It is a great pity to see one so young and so fair, sacrificing herself for such a popinjay; and I think a word from you who know her so well, would go very far to stop the thing from becoming too serious. Every one is talking about it, it is true, but if it ends here, it will be forgotten with the rest of the 'nine-days' wonders' of this rattle-brained London."

Kitty read the paragraph very quietly, and handed the letter back to Miss Marchmont.

"Well?" was all she said.

"I beg your pardon, my dear, it is *not* well. You have no idea what Londoners are when they get upon the track of a choice scandal like this. Considering all things, your youth and beauty, Captain Conyer's high position, and Mr. Oliver's strange and unexplained absence, I think you can hardly wonder that the gossips have at last fallen tooth and nail upon you!"

"Let them," said Kitty, indifferently.

"My dear child, just consider what you are saying. Come, you are hurt and grieved, and I am not surprised. But don't be angry with me, or refuse to take my advice."

"What is it?"

"Write a nice little note to Mr. Oliver, and ask him to come back to you. Put your pride out of sight for once, dear Kitty, and remember that it is far nobler to forgive than to be forgiven, any day. He will certainly come when he knows you wish it; and when he gets here, don't reproach him with the past, but kiss and be friends, and make your happiness in the future."

Kitty's nostrils began to dilate, and her dark eyes to flash.

"Have you done?" she asked, quietly.

"Yes."

"Then hear me. The dearest wish of my own heart is, that I may never look upon my husband's face again. I loved him dearly—how has he returned, or even prized that love? I gave him all I had to give—youth, beauty (if you call it so), innocence, and perfect trust. Was he worthy of the gift, then? Has he shown himself worthy of it, since? He has disgraced and insulted me publicly, and now you wish me to cringe to him, and beg him to return. I will die first!"

"But, my dear—"

"No—don't say it. Don't let me bear any more such special pleading from your lips, Miss Marchmont. You know that you are talking against your own convictions, when you recommend this course to me. Why, you would perish yourself before you would ever stoop to win a man back who had deserted you, as he has deserted me—ay, if he were fifty times your husband!"

Miss Marchmont could not help smiling at seeing herself so thoroughly understood.

"We women certainly have a wonderful gift, and read each other as if we were so many open books," she said. "At the same time, Kitty, you are better than I am, and what I might do in such a case is no fit precedent for you."

"But look at that!" burst out Kitty, flinging down the letter from Paris. "Read that, and see if I am so much to blame."

Miss Marchmont obeyed; and I think if any lingering tenderness had remained in her heart for Francis Oliver, these words would have driven it away at once and for ever. Her first thought was one of gratitude that he was not her husband, and, therefore, she had no personal cause to blush for him; her next was for Kitty

"My dear," she said, kindly, "it is very hard for you to bear, and if it was not for your own sake, I would not persist in my request. But your position looks so false and so dangerous to me, that I can't help still asking you to receive him kindly when he does come, and so show him that these terrible accusations are not true."

"I wish I was dead!" cried Kitty, passionately. "I wish I had died before I had ever seen that man! Why did he come to trouble me in my quiet home? I should have been happier there than I can ever be here, and poor William would never have left me as Mr. Oliver has done."

"What is—is, and what must be—must be," said Miss Marchmont, availing herself of the never-failing scrap of philosophy with which she comforted herself under the most untoward circumstances. "Come, Kitty, put as brave a face upon the matter as you can. Mr. Oliver will be here in a few days, and I will meet him with you, and add my explanation to yours. There is no use in regretting the marriage now that it has taken place. You must make the best of it, and of life. Oh, if you only knew how many people, who have lost all hopes of any great or real happiness here, are doing that—making the best of life—and nothing more!"

She sighed as she spoke, but Kitty, absorbed in her own trouble, did not hear her—did not think it possible that Miss Marchmont, rich, and free, and single, could be sad. There is nothing makes us so selfish as grief. We exact sympathy on every side, and think ourselves terribly ill-used if we do not receive it, but we never dream of offering it in return; never think of asking if the good Samaritan, who is binding up our wounds, may have one deeper and more painful still. Kitty was only like all the rest of the world in this respect, and Miss Marchmont was too well used to such neglect to mind it. These gay, sanguine, seemingly light-hearted people bear their burdens much more stoutly, and with much less public outcry, than those upon whom trouble seems to lay the heaviest hand. Which suffers most? Have we not always been told that wounds, bleeding inwardly, are the most dangerous of their kind?

For nearly an hour, the two friends talked, going over every feature and incident of the case, from the first meeting in the New Forest to that

very day. And still Miss Marchmont's advice was the same. "Wait till Mr. Oliver comes; meet him kindly, and all will yet be well." It was not, as Kitty had so truly said, the course she herself would have adopted under such circumstances. But she felt too deeply the responsibility resting upon her as the young wife's nearest friend, to counsel any other. However unhappy her home might be, Kitty, she thought, was not fit to face the world alone. In fact, as matters stood at that moment, there seemed an infinite danger of her facing it in company with Captain Conyers; and that must be prevented even at the cost of any comfort, peace, and happiness.

The afternoon was waning when Miss Marchmont took her leave, fancying that her point was gained, and that Kitty was saved for the time being. Alas! that I should have to relate such a thing; scarcely was her back turned, before the note which had been the primary cause of this long debate, was on its way to Captain Conyers. Kitty, having dispatched it, ate her dinner *sans ceremonie*; then going up into her dressing-room, made a most ravishing toilet. For whom?

She descended to the library just as the sun was setting. The fresh evening breeze rustled the vines at the window, and played with the curls that hung loosely upon her neck. She gathered a flower as she passed the vase upon the study-table, and stood, touching it lightly against her lips, while she waited. Again—for whom?

The hall-door unclosed; there were voices outside. She listened, smiling, without turning round. Then the library-door opened softly, and some one entered. There was an instant's pause, and still she smiled on, and would not turn her head. Her hand was taken in one that trembled violently; she turned, looked down—and Captain Conyers was kneeling at her feet!

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Some said that it was a siren
Who had left her emerald hollow,
To lure such as these to follow,
Through all dangers that environ,
To her home amidst the surges,
For she hates man—does the siren."

—W. THORNBURY.

Within that library, and just opposite Kitty's seat, hung a picture.

A lonely mountain tarn, waveless and tideless, dusky and deep in the shadow of its banks, pellucid and chill in the open light, and covered over with the white blossoms of water-lilies. She knew not what region gave birth to the painter's fancy. It was her impression that neither Scottish hills nor English lowlands boasted of such a placid spot. She imagined, rather, that the rugged, heathery hills in the background, and the rush-edged margin of the shore, belonged of right to a land in which painters and poets are apt to lose themselves—the land where strange figures meet the eye, and strange music falls upon the ear; where at one turn you meet Ali Baba in his woodman's dress, and at another come upon a fairy princess, as she walks, at evening, in the "Island of Calm Delights". To that land belonged the gray, neutral tint of the night-sky—the one cloud hanging above the hills—the pale crescent moon mounting slowly in the heavens, deserted by her court of stars, and dreaming sadly of the false Endymion. Above all, that land could claim a figure in the foreground, from which the picture took its name: "The Spirit of the Water Lily." Gracefully she floated out from the shadow into the pale moonlight, among the flowers, enveloped in a gauzy veil, through whose soft folds the undulating curve of every limb could be distinctly traced; one hand playing with the water, the other holding a gem-like cluster of lilies (whose wide petals and dark green leaves sent a shower of drops down upon her white shoulder and outstretched arm) above her head. Lilies twined about her limbs and blossomed at her feet—lilies touched her gauze-veiled breast, more pure and white than they—lilies starred the rippling masses of brown hair that fell over her shoulders. She was gazing out from the pic-

ture with the softest and saddest of brown eyes; her brow was that of a queen; her lovely mouth half smiled, but with a smile that only comes to human lips after the heart is broken. Something in her aspect suited well the dim repose of the scene, the lonely hills, and the quiet sky. She was an Undine, leaving the world that had betrayed her, and sinking down, after one last look, through the green depths of the sea, to her expectant sisters.

That picture ranked in the list of Kitty's household gods. She had purchased it at a city auction, getting it at so low a price that she was almost ashamed to pay it. She had it mounted after a fancy of her own—white and gold lines inclosed the sombre canvas, and in their turn were framed in polished black. It hung above her writing-table, in the vine-shaded study sacred to herself; and it was her custom, as she paced up and down the room in the twilight, to stand long before it and muse. The "Spirit of the Water Lily" was no spirit at such times, but a woman like herself, who smiled her moonlight smile, and spoke, in her reed-like voice, of secrets which only she and Kitty knew. I fancy some matter-of-fact reader will laugh at what I am going to say: she grew, at last, to regard her as a kind of shadowy friend—dead to all others, but alive to her—quiet upon her watery bed all day, yet summoning reality of expression to her eyes at night—feeling glad when she rejoiced, and suffering if she was sad. She even talked to her at times; the taking away of that picture would have left a terrible blank in her life. If any one thinks her a fit candidate for Bedlam after this avowal, I cannot help it—it is made.

The yellow light of the moon shone softly on the canvas, the same light trembled on the vines and flowers outside. She leaned against the open casement and looked out. What a sight! What an earth! If it could be so fair below, oh, what would Heaven be! Moonlight, music, youth, and love (for that always ends the catalogue), yes, they were all there. The kneeling form at her feet—the trembling grasp of her hand. What did they mean but that?

That man and woman loved each other, purely as yet, but only God could tell how long that would be.

They had met too late, and in those words may be told the story of many a wrecked life beside theirs. What was to be done? To leave them to each other's society—that would be to plunge two souls into a bottomless pit of anguish, and remorse, and crime. Some one must watch them zealously. Some one must keep them from plunging into the gulf upon whose edge they stood. A thankless task!

Upon the window's edge lay an open volume of "Byron's Poems". A light breeze fluttered the leaves of the book. Kitty looked down a moment, then a peculiar smile stole across her lips, as she read:

"Heigho! 'tis evident we're made of clay,
And harden unless kept in tears and shade,
This fashionable sunshine takes away
Much that we err in losing, I'm afraid.
I wonder what my guardian angels say
About the sort of woman I have made!"

The last words checked her—she read them again more slowly—and then considered, looking up toward the calm night-sky, as if she saw the faces of those grieved angels there. Perhaps she did. Perhaps they shaded her with their white wings one moment, and whispered in her ear; she looked as if she was struggling with herself: she half rose.

But the trembling hand, grown stronger now, detained her, and the low voice said:

"Do not leave me!"

She hesitated—lingered—and listened. From that moment all became like an opium dream to her.

The night was hot. In spite of the bright moon, there was thunder in the sky, and the air oppressed her. She sat with her face turned toward the window, wrapped in a trance-like languor that was far too delicious to lose by a movement or a thought. Faces passed before her that she had not seen for years—voices spoke that had long been silent in the tomb—flowers bloomed that had faded and been forgotten—songs were sung that she had never thought

to hear again. Even her husband was forgotten: she was a girl once more, and happy among those who had made the brightness of her girlhood's years.

From this Elysian trance she came by degrees into a state more akin to her usual one; but still the dark clouds chased the wan moon about the heavens, ever and anon rushing upon her and hiding her from the face of the earth. Strange fancies crossed the young wife's mind—a tale she had been reading that day, a wild story about a haunted house, a murdered man, and a lonely churchyard on the hill, got possession of her. Suddenly she heard a step in the hall, another and a lighter one followed it, then came the murmur of voices, low, but quite distinct.

"I cannot—I cannot—do not urge me," sobbed one, and then the deeper one chimed in:

"All is lost now. There is no time for scruples. You must follow me."

Was that the spirit of the murdered man? Had he come up the lonely road at midnight? Would he drag back the murderer to the churchyard with him? She had forgotten if the story said so; she remembered, though, that there was a winding stair inside the house, and how it turned, and turned, and turned; then she was trying to follow its mazes, till her head whirled, and yet she could not see the bottom step. What next?

A pleading, tearful outcry—then a low voice saying, urgently:

"Hush! For God's sake!"

And then steps stealing lightly toward the door—a breath of fragrance from the flowers outside—and all was still. A dull consciousness that some one wanted her—that some one had called her name, seized upon her; and yet she felt powerless to stir. It was so delicious to sit, neither asleep nor awake, and watch the night! By-and-by she heard the soft plashing of oars in the water under the window, and she began to think of a long summer's day she had spent once in a boat just outside the shore-line at Christ-church. She could see the bright sunshine, the blue waves, the clear bottom of the beach as she rocked up and down near the shore, could feel the soft west winds also, and hear the sailors singing on the ships as they passed far out at sea. The sound of oars grew fainter—she mustered energy enough to lift her head, and saw a boat rapidly crossing the bay. A flash of lightning came, and a dark cloud passed over the moon.

Out of that strange state she awoke, feverish and parched with thirst, and with a dull, dizzy pain in her head. What was the matter? The captain was no longer kneeling at her feet, but bending over her, and wildly adjuring her to speak to him. She put her hand feebly to her head, then a sudden thought struck her.

She went up into her bedroom and took a wine-cup, which still stood upon the table, and raised it to her lips. A few drops still remained. She could discern both the taste and smell of laudanum. Just before leaving her room she had tasted that wine. It had been drugged. By whom?

She went back to the library, feeling frightened and confused. The captain was still there, pacing to and fro like a madman. He ran to her as she entered, and flung his arms around her.

"Kitty, my love, my darling, what does all this mean? What ailed you just now? You were so white and still. You looked as if you were dead, and you would not speak to me. Are you ill?"

"Some one placed a cup of wine upon my dressing-table," she said, in a strange, hoarse voice. "I tasted it before I come to you, and then my senses seemed to leave me. I have just been back to my room, and that wine was full of laudanum. O George, what does it mean?" she faltered, clinging to him in sudden terror.

Now, the simple truth was, that Kitty's housekeeper was ill, and that the lady's maid had undertaken to give her a soothing-dose. To make it more palatable, she put it into a glass of port wine. Having to carry it up-stairs, she

stopped on her way to do something to Kitty's evening-dress, and left the glass upon the toilet-table. When she went for it, the wine was half gone, and not daring to confess her blunder, she left it where it was, and made haste to procure a fresh draught for her friend. At that very moment she was trembling in her own room, at the thought of the dire consequences which might ensue from her carelessness. The captain knew nothing of all this, and rushed to a conclusion which frightened Kitty half to death, and favored his views more than anything else could have done.

"My love," he said, "they are trying to poison you. Your husband, no doubt, is at the bottom of this vile plot. You must not stay another day in this house. Fly with me, my darling, you will be safer anywhere than you are here."

Bewildered, terrified, and confused, Kitty made little resistance. He drew her gently away, his heart beating high with love and triumph. He flung a scarf around her and over her head. He laid his hand upon the doer. It was flung abruptly open at that instant, almost in his face, and Miss Marchmont entered hurriedly, followed by La Stella!

CHAPTER XIX.

"The madmen run but faster,
Evil led and evil seeking;
Caring not for wife or maiden,
Caring not for child or master.
All their hope is on the siren,
Could they struggle on but faster."

—W. THORNBURY.

A more awkward situation could not well be imagined! The flying pair started asunder, with an explanation on the part of the captain that sounded suspiciously like an oath. La Stella seemed to have hard work to keep from laughing, deeply as she felt the serious turn the affair had taken. Miss Marchmont locked the door and put the key in her pocket.

"We are not too late," she remarked. "Thank heaven for that."

The captain looked askance at Kitty. Her position was humiliating; but his was worse; it was ludicrous! To attempt to run away with your friend's wife, and to have that elopement nipped in the bud by the unexpected appearance of a professional and a literary star, and to have one of the ladies coolly lock you up, while she is arranging the heads of her coming lecture in her own mind, while the other bites her lips, flourishes her handkerchief, and looks preternaturally grave, yet cannot hide her laughing eyes. Is it not enough to put any man out of temper with them—out of conceit with himself? Certainly, the captain looked furious enough at being thus caught, like a rat in a trap. But, under all the circumstances, he could not order the ladies to restore the key, and leave the room and house. He devoutly hoped Kitty might do so; but, after the first instantaneous feeling of surprise and anger, she looked singularly meek, and, moving still farther away from him, leaned against the table with downcast eyes.

"Not too late," repeated Miss Marchmont, with a satisfied smile, when she found she was to have it all her own way. "Kitty, my poor child, you ought to go down on your knees, and thank the kind Providence that sent us here, to keep you from committing such a folly—such a crime."

Kitty was silent, but her lips quivered.

"I will not ask how far you are to blame in this deplorable business," continued Miss Marchmont. "I am sure you have been persuaded, coaxed, and entreated to take this step by one who ought to have been the first to save you from it."

"Meaning me, madam, I suppose," said the captain, who was by this time at the boiling-point.

"Meaning you, of course," she answered, coolly. "Do you think La Stella or myself have had a hand in urging the child on to her ruin?"

"May I beg to know how Miss Marchmont came to be so well-informed about the movements of her neighbors?" he asked, with a sneer.

"Certainly. I have not the slightest objec-

tion to tell you. I was here this afternoon with Kitty, and we talked about this very subject, and about you. After I left her, some friends of mine called at the 'Growlery', and in the course of conversation mentioned that you were on the point of leaving for the Continent at once. I feared that Kitty might hear this rumor, and do something, in her loneliness and unhappiness, of which she would afterward repent. So I came over here to tell her myself. At the gate, I met La Stella, who was coming to call, and we entered together. The rest you know."

"I do, indeed, and can only regret, madam, that you should have taken such a vast amount of trouble for one so utterly unworthy of your condescension."

"Who is that—Kitty?"

"I was speaking of myself."

"Indeed! Well, don't trouble yourself to thank me for any pains I have taken on your account, Captain Conyers. I am afraid I must be rude enough to say that I never gave you a thought. It was Kitty for whom I was anxious—Kitty, whom I was determined to save."

The captain made a low bow, begged pardon with proud humility, and withdrew himself from the group. Miss Marchmont, having fired her broadside at him, walked up to Kitty and put her arm gently around her waist.

"Yes, it was Kitty whom I tried to save. My poor child! I can quite understand how you came to think of this mad act. You felt as if you were quite alone in the world—as if no one cared for you but him, and you were going to fly from the unhappiness that surrounds you on every side here."

"Yes, it is true," sighed Kitty, and her head dropped till it rested on the friendly shoulder, and the tears began to come. No one could have called Miss Marchmont cold or hard, who had seen her bending over that hidden face, that drooping form, with the tenderest and deepest sympathy a woman's heart could give.

"It was natural enough, Kitty—natural enough. But I doubt if you would have been happier. A sinful heart was never yet a light one. A sinful life is never free from care. You are better here with us, Kitty, than you would have been abroad with him. And, after all, happiness is not what we are to look for in this world: it is the crowning glory of the next. Here, Kitty, we have to do our duty, be it pleasant or unpleasant; and the very doing it will bring, in time, its own reward. Now, your duty is—do you know what it is, Kitty?"

"Oh, I cannot give him up—I cannot!" said Kitty, raising her head and looking at her lover with streaming eyes. "Don't ask me to do that. He has been so kind when every one else was cold and hard. The thought that he loves me is the only thing that helps me to bear this weary load of life. Mr. Oliver has left me. You know he hates me—but George—George loves me better than any one else on earth. Don't send him away!"

It was weak—it was childish—it was wrong. But the appeal burst so naturally and so innocently from the sorrowful young heart, that Miss Marchmont's eyes filled with tears, and La Stella turned away her head. As for the captain, he would have thrown himself at Kitty's feet at that instant, but Miss Marchmont prevented him; and there was something in her look and manner that showed she would not be trifled with.

"If you really love her," she said, significantly, "show it now."

"In what way?"

"She gave him the key, and pointed to the door. The captain glanced at Kitty, who had hidden her face once more upon Miss Marchmont's shoulder, hesitated an instant, then, in a paroxysm of powerless fury, he dashed the key upon the floor, passed through the French window, that opened on the lawn, and disappeared behind a flowering mass of shrubs.

This sudden and unexpected deliverance simplified matters wonderfully. When he had gone, Kitty became more reasonable. She listened to arguments and entreaties of her two friends—with tears it is true, but still she listened. She owned that she had been in the

wrong; and when a woman can do that, I think there are really great hopes of her. But at the same time she declared, with the greatest energy, that she hated her husband, and she wished that she was dead! Life seemed so long, so weary, so full of trouble, the poor child cried!

"That is an old complaint, Kitty; a very old one," said Miss Marchmont, as she rose to go. "I don't know that we can alter that for you—but to be good, and then it will not matter how sad life may have been, so that all is bright at death. Take some one for your model who has gone through much suffering, and borne it like a hero—or like a Christian, which is better—and see if you cannot do the same."

"I will take you, then," said Kitty, looking up into her face, with one of those strange glances that sometimes startled those who knew her best.

Miss Marchmont started and flushed up—but recovering herself, said, sadly: "No, I can be no guide—no example for you, dear Kitty. We have both been wrong, and my own life has been a wretched and useless one. I cannot point to one good or noble deed I have ever done. Take warning by me, and live for others beside yourself. Follow La Stella's example—she has been happiest of us all. It has all been 'vanity of vanities' for you and I so far. But I have your promise, that you will live differently. And in heaven nothing is vain. Tell her so, La Stella! You know it even better than I."

Leaving the two friends together, Miss Marchmont returned to her own home. She was in a singularly-discouraged and despondent mood. As she sat alone in her study, recalling the events of the evening, her head drooped, her eyes grew dim, and her face looked weary. It seemed so dark—so dark in the future for her, and for those who were dear to her. It was an hour of utter despondency—an hour which the greatest of living poetesses described only a short time before her death, in words that will find an answer in every feeling soul:

"Tired out we are, my heart and I.
Suppose the world brought diadems
To tempt us, crusted with loose gems
Of powers and pleasures? Let it try.
We scarcely care to look at even
A pretty child, or God's blue heaven,
We feel so tired, my heart and I."

CHAPTER XX.

"As when a soul laments, which hath been blest
Desiring what is mingled with past years,
In yearnings that can never be express'd
By sighs, or groans, or tears;

"Because all words, though culled with choicest care,
Failing to give the bitter and the sweet,
Wither beneath the palate, and the heart
Faints, faded by its heat."

Kitty was looking for something, which was not to be had, save at the expense of such trifles as honor, virtue, peace, and happiness. Mind, I do not for a moment say that she had one deliberate thought of wrong in her foolish little head. She did not intend to be wicked—she did not mean to singe her wings; she only fluttered around the flame, foolish moth that she was, and admired its beauty, pined after its warmth—that was all.

She had no business to think of, or to wish for, any love except her husband's. I know that, dear lady, as well as you, and will cheerfully throw the second stone at this erring sister, if you will but lift the first. But she was young, she was lonely, and she was idle; and idleness are the two parents of mischief. Did she love this man who was trying to win her? I do not think so. She tried to persuade herself that she did, for her heart felt as empty as a "last year's nest", and she longed to fill it again—with something—anything—so it was but filled.

But she had once loved her husband with every pulse and fibre of that lonely heart.

However this may be, and however Kitty may really have felt toward her new friend, she certainly wished him to love her. There spoke the pride of the proud, deserted woman, which must be appeased, at whatever cost.

She paced up and down the lonely library, with folded arms and gloomy brow. She was struggling desperately with the weakness that

threatened to enslave her for the second time. Nothing but immediate flight could save her, and yet she lingered, dreading the hour of departure—ah, she well knew why!

Only one month had passed since she met Captain Conyers, and the events that had followed in quick succession might well have preserved her from any return of the old unhappy passion. Yet, day after day, she had been beside him, drinking in the music of his voice, and feeling her sorrow more than half-lightened and removed by the tearful glance of his beautiful eyes, or the kindly pressure of his hand. She thought of the future—of the happy future he had sometimes dared to picture when they were alone. Only as the wife of this man could she fulfill it; his wife she could never be. Since, then, it was in vain for her to hope for such happiness, was it not wrong and criminal in her to risk her future peace by thus remaining near him?

"Wrong? Yes. I am a weak and cowardly fool!" she exclaimed.

And, pausing before a fine portrait of Captain Conyers, which was lying on her writing-desk, she looked at it long and steadily.

"For the last time!" she thought to herself. "This is my last hour of weakness. Let me tell myself once more that those eyes will never smile on me; those lips never meet mine as I would have them; and then back to my duties. I must forget him, and I will! And yet, George, I doubt if any other woman will ever love you as truly and tenderly as I could do if I might, or if I dared. Oh! why has fate come between us like this! Wealth and fame are nothing to me now. I would gladly resign both, so I might be happy, and with him!"

She sighed heavily, and turned away. A softened splendor trembled in her eye as she passed slowly down the room. She paused upon the threshold, gave one last, lingering look at the portrait that looked so calmly upon her sorrow, and laid her hand upon the latch. It was opened from without; and, as she stood aside to let the intruder pass, La Stella entered.

The beautiful face of the singer was very grave and sad. She had come to make a last appeal to her friend, which she hoped might save her. Words she knew were almost vain in a case like this; but she had that to enforce her words which might impress the most headstrong nature—the most hardened heart. Her first glance at Kitty told her that she had found her in a pliable and hopeful mood.

"My dear," she said, gently, "I have taken the liberty of ordering your carriage, and I hope you will not refuse to go out with me."

Kitty shrank back with a look of pain.

"Don't ask that, La Stella. I feel too unhappy—too broken down. I should not care if I never went out of these grounds again till they carried me in my coffin."

"I do not want you to see any of your friends, my dear; but a poor girl whom I have known for some time is dying, and has sent for me. She can only live a very few hours. Kitty, I want you to see her before she dies."

Kitty was leaving the room, but stopped upon the threshold. Some tone in the speaker's voice struck her strangely.

"Why do you wish me to go?" she asked.

The color mounted to La Stella's face, but she answered frankly:

"My dear, she is as young, and was once as pretty as you. She was in a great danger, was greatly tempted, and she fell. I thought if you could see her—"

"That I should repent—reform—take care of myself, and be good girl!" exclaimed Kitty, haughtily. "I won't go a step! And yet—yes, I will."

She ran up to her room, came down within ten minutes dressed for her visit, and they drove away. Up through the fresh, green country-roads, into the very heart of the hot and dusty city; through street after street of wretched houses—whose inmates, gaunt, squalid, and hollow-eyed, gazed after the carriage with a dull and listless curiosity—they went, until they entered the most disreputable thoroughfare of all, known to its denizens and to all London by the

name of the New Cut; and during the drive, La Stella told, in her pretty, foreign idiom, the story of the girl they were going to see; and Kitty listened, taking the haggard men, the degraded women, the squalid children she saw on either side of the street as living commentaries on the warning text.

It was a sad—a warning tale; but the name of the betrayer was not mentioned. And the poor girl was dying when they reached her, so that Kitty had no time to ask it.

When all was over, the two friends left the house in silence. Kitty did not speak all through the homeward drive. La Stella was also silent, but she looked perplexed and puzzled, as if she was studying how best to fulfill another and a still more painful duty. Kitty, looking up as they entered the gates of "Gan Eden" once more, caught that peculiar expression. In an instant she flushed crimson, and turned deadly pale.

"La Stella," she said, faintly, "there is something which you have not told me yet. Poor Janet's case was not quite like mine; she was not married. Why did you take me there, and what was the name of the man whom she first loved?"

"That is just what I wish to tell you, my dear. He was younger than than he is now. He might have been thoughtless, as well as cruel; I cannot say. But there is a packet which she asked me to give him after her death. Open it Kitty, and you will know his name."

"Kitty took it, sprang from the carriage, and shut herself up in the library. She tore open the parcel with wild and eager haste. A packet of letters, a lock of brown and of golden hair, braided together, and a miniature case, fell upon the table. She opened that case with trembling hands, and then sank into a chair, with a bitter groan. It was a younger, a fairer face, perhaps: but it was the face of George Conyers!

CHAPTER XXI.

"Oh, wae's me for the hour, Willie,
When we thegither met!
Oh, wae's me for the time, Willie,
When our first tryst was set!
Oh, wae's me for the loamin' green,
Where we were wont to gae;
And wae's me for the destinie,
That gart me luve thee sae!"

—MOTHERWELL.

When the first shock of the discovery had passed away, and Kitty was herself once more, she took up that fatal portrait, and compared it with the one which Captain Conyers had placed in her hand only one little week before. There could be no doubt remaining. One was a slender and graceful boy; the other, a bronzed and bearded man; but the blue eyes laughed, and the full lips smiled the same—the very same in both!

She laid the pictures down, and lifted the remaining contents of the packet from the floor. That soft, golden tress of hair, entwined with the darker curl, to whom could it belong but one? She sickened as she looked at it, remembering how often, during that month of happiness, she had gazed upon such tresses, and longed, yet never dared, to twine them around her fingers, to brush them back from the open brow they shaded. She covered her face with her hands, and a hot blush stole to her very temples at the thought.

"How can I blame this poor, dead girl, even in my secret heart?" she said, sadly to herself. "She was guilty, it is true; but I have been guiltier far. At least, she had the right to love him which I have not. No tie, human or divine, bound her to any one else on earth—and I, a married woman—a woman who loved her husband once—ay,"—she cried, wildly wringing her hands—"who worshiped him once—I have been trying to teach my heart to watch for this man's footstep—to wait and yearn for his smile! I am fallen in my own esteem, if not of the world's; and this life of outward purity which I lead is a sham, a mockery, a lie!"

She struck her hand upon the table with a fiery scorn and indignant loathing of herself and her own weakness which a colder woman could scarcely have felt. At that moment some one tapped lightly at the door. She knew

who it was; and when La Stella, in answer to her summons, entered, she rose, took both her hands, and kissed her warmly.

"You forgive me, then," said La Stella, with an air of infinite relief. "I could not help doing as I did, even though I feared the act would quite lose me your friendship."

"Forgive you!" cried Kitty, impulsively. "It is for you to forgive me. For you and all the world! Oh, you don't know what you have saved me from!"

"Perhaps I can guess."

"You see, La Stella, I thought he loved me, and that he would never desert me, as Mr. Oliver did. But if he loved poor Janet, and was going to marry her, and then deserted her—his own cousin, too—what right have I to believe that he would be more constant to me? And if I had gone with him, as he urged me to, if he had deserted me—oh! La Stella—I feel something here"—and she struck her hand upon her heart—"something that tells me I should have been far more wicked than poor Janet, and not so penitent—not so good at the last!"

"Only our good Father above can tell that," said La Stella, gently; "and your thanks are due to Him rather than they are to me for your safety."

Kitty did not answer. She only looked shy and uncomfortable, as she always did if any one made any religious allusion in her presence. She had a horror of what she called "preaching"; and knowing this, the singer only dropped this one small seed upon the stony ground, and returned to the subject under discussion.

"I suppose you will see him no more," she observed. "Shall I take this packet and give it to him?"

"No; I will give it to him myself."

La Stella shook her head.

"Don't misunderstand me. I don't wish to see him alone. You shall stay in the room all the while; but—but he has been kind to me, and I must say good-bye."

Her voice faltered as she spoke.

"It is unwise," said La Stella; "but I know how very easy it is to give advice in these cases; and how very hard it is to take it. I can see the folly, the imprudence, of such a meeting; but the pain, the soreness at your heart that is craving for, and may be softened and healed by it, I cannot see."

"That is just it," cried poor Kitty, with a sob. "Whatever he may have been to her, he has been good to me, and kind, when every one else seemed cold and hard. If I may only shake hands with him, and part kindly, I shall be content."

"Very well. I suppose I am a fool for encouraging such a thing, but I cannot quite forget that I was myself young and in love, once upon a time. You shall see him, poor child, and I will stay with you all the time."

Kitty thanked her mutely by putting her arms around her waist, and laying her weary little head upon her shoulder. La Stella smoothed the dark hair from her forehead with a loving touch. At that moment a servant opened the library-door, and, with a visible hesitation in his manner—perhaps at the lateness of the hour—perhaps because of the gossip of the servants' hall—announced "Captain Conyers!"

CHAPTER XXII.

"Oh, dinna mind my words, Willie
I downa seek to blame;
But, oh, it's hard to live, Willie,
And dree a warld's shame!"

* * * * *
"I'm weary o' this warld, Willie,
And sick wi' a' I see;
I canna live as I have lived,
Or be as I should be!"

—MOTHERWELL.

Both ladies started. La Stella glanced anxiously at her friend, but, after the first instance, Kitty was the more composed of the two.

"Show Captain Conyers into the drawing-room," she said, quietly.

The servant disappeared; and a moment after they had entered the room, the captain, looking haggard, anxious, and ill, rushed in.

His dress was disordered—his fair hair pushed back from his forehead—his whole appearance that of a man made insensible, for the time, by misery to everything around. He did not even see La Stella, as he rushed up to Kitty and caught her hand.

"Oh, I have suffered torments since I left you! Kitty, this cannot be borne? We have gone too far to turn back now, and you must be mine!"

Kitty did not speak—she could not. But La Stella, rising and coming forward, said, in her low, sweet voice:

"She does not see the necessity of that mad step, Captain Conyers—nor do I!"

The captain dropped Kitty's hand, and retreated a step.

"You here, La Stella?" he said, gnawing his lip, and looking utterly discomfited.

"Yes; by Kitty's own wish and request."

He looked as if he did not, would not, believe that!

"Is it not, Kitty?" she asked, turning toward her.

"It is," said Kitty, gravely. "And this Captain Conyers, will tell you why."

As she spoke, she held the miniature toward him. He glanced at it with an air of wildest incredulity and surprise, and retreated still farther from her, muttering confusedly:

"That—Janet's picture—how did you come by that? Good heavens! Don't ask me to take it!"

Kitty laid it down again upon the table. There could be no further concealment between the two.

"Captain Conyers!" she said, in the same grave, unimpassioned voice, "your cousin Janet is dead! I was with her at the last. She left that for you! She forgave you, too. The merest chance in the world led to the discovery of your secret; but I am glad now that it is known. You will not have my guilt, my weakness to answer for at the Last Day, as you must have hers."

The captain, having somewhat recovered his composure during this speech, began to stammer out some denial or excuse, but Kitty stopped him.

"Say nothing that is not strictly true, because I know all—all about Louis Heath, as well as George Conyers. In a few minutes, we shall have parted for ever! Don't let me think that, at the last moment, you, whom I believed to be so good, so noble, and so truthful, stooped to tell a lie!"

If she had wept—if she had scorned—if she had upbraided him—he might possibly have known how to manage her. But she was so calm, so grave, that he felt abashed and awe-stricken. He watched her silently as she folded the hair, the letters, and her own and Janet's picture of him, neatly in the parcel once more. He took it from her hand, when she offered it, put it in the breast pocket of his coat, and still stood gazing at her. La Stella, seeing how well the matter was progressing, drew back into her own corner, and held her tongue.

"And this is the end of all!" the captain observed, at last. "After all our pleasant days and evenings—after all our close and intimate friendship—I am kicked out of the house like a dog, on account of a boyish folly, which was over years before I ever saw you!"

Kitty's color rose high at his tone and manner.

"You call it a boyish folly only!" she said. "I call it more. You broke a heart that loved you! You ruined a life that might have been good and pure! And for all these things God will bring you into judgment, lightly as you look upon them now! For the rest, I can only say that poor Janet's sad fate was a warning to me; but the words you have just uttered are a deeper warning still! I can say good-bye more easily now that you have spoken them!"

"Kitty, what do you mean? Do you think I could ever have forgotten—ever have forsaken you?"

"Most certainly I do."

"Then you wrong me bitterly. I behaved like a villain to poor Janet, I know; but I was a mere boy, and she was not like you. If you

had trusted yourself to me, Kitty, my life would have been one long effort to make you happy."

"Words—words!" said Kitty, dreamily.

"I would have proved them true. Nay, I will still do so, if you will allow me."

At that speech, La Stella rose, and came forward with flashing eyes.

"Some allowance, I suppose, ought to be made for your position and your feelings, Captain Conyers," she said; "but, as Mrs. Oliver's friend, I must tell you, that if you dare to repeat that offer, or to insult her in any way again, I will ring the bell, and have you turned out of the house by the servants five minutes afterward."

"And if she does not, I will!" said Kitty, leaning her chin upon her hand and looking steadily at him.

If she had struck him he could scarcely have looked more astonished. He muttered something indistinctly, and turned to go.

"Stop a moment, Captain Conyers," said Kitty. "I shall never see you again."

"Never, Kitty—never! I swear that, if you send me from you now, I will join my regiment to-morrow, and bid you and Old England a last farewell together."

A little, shivering sigh fluttered from Kitty's lips; but she gave no other sign of weakness.

"Well, it is better so; and I hope you may live to be a good and happy man, as well as a brave soldier."

"You would make me both."

"We will not talk more of that; out, for the sake of old times, the old friendship, I will say, 'God speed!' and we will part kindly. If you ever think of me in India, forget all this folly, and remember me only as a friend, whose best wishes follow you wherever you may go."

"Kitty!"

It was dreadful to see him, as he caught her hand and kissed it, with choking sobs and burning tears. Whatever his fault might have been, it was evident that he loved her more than life itself. She turned pale as she saw him weep—she wavered, and all might have been lost, but for La Stella's prompt interference.

"True love is the most unselfish thing on earth," she said to the young soldier. "I feel for you with all my heart; but if she is really dear to you, you will leave her now."

"Dear to me? La Stella, she is life itself! And must I leave her? Leave her to a man who cares nothing for her—who—O Kitty! tell me, am I to go or not?"

"Go, George!"

Brave words, that fell like drops of blood from her wrung and tortured heart! They made him love her better, even while they spoke his doom.

"I will! God bless you, Kitty!—God keep you good! Oh, it is the last time. Let me kiss your forehead. It is the last time we shall meet, unless we meet in heaven."

Half fainting in La Stella's arms, Kitty felt a cold hand grasp her own—felt the touch of cold lips upon her brow—then a door closed, and all was silent, and a dark, empty void of loneliness seemed to encompass her upon every side.

"Oh, he has gone!" she moaned, as she hid her face upon La Stella's friendly breast. "Why did you make me drive him away?"

Did she repent already? Never mind. La-water tells us that a good deed, done at any moment, is a good deed done for all eternity; and He who faltered in the Garden of Gethsemane before His dreadful task, will surely pardon us if the frail flesh shrinks back in dismay, and repines at the rough path over which the stronger and more faithful spirit is leading it.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Alas! that love was not too strong
For maiden shame and manly pride.

Alas! that they delayed so long

The goal of mutual bliss beside.

"Yet what no chance could then reveal,
And neither would be first to own,

Let fate and courage now conceal

Where truth could bring remorse alone."

—R. MONCKTON MILNES.

The "Growlery" had many a pleasant nook

and corner, within and without; but one of the pleasantest, at least to Miss Marchmont's eye, was an old summer-house, half-hidden with ivy, that was perched, like a bird-cage, upon the southern garden-wall. There was nothing, it would seem, to recommend it to a lady's taste; and yet, in the soft sunshine of that autumn-day, when the birds were singing among the elms, the rooks cawing around their nests, and the swallows darting in and out in the ivy that covered the front of the building—how pleasant a place it seemed, with its loose board floors and open front, through which a charming prospect of hill and valley, and calm blue sky and river met her lifted eyes!

Miss Marchmont's seat was in an old, worm-eaten chaise-longue, stowed there by some careful hand, and furnished by her own with cushion and footstool, whereon to lounge, with book or pencil in hand.

Born with an artistic eye and taste, though unable to reproduce the creatures of her fancy, she often, in her solitude, painted, mentally, the most glowing landscapes, the sunniest, clearest skies, the most impassioned and beautiful faces. And now a face, both beautiful and beloved, was on the spiritual canvas; a few more spirited touches, a more decided curve to the handsome lips, and a deeper, heavenlier blue within the glorious eyes, and it would be complete. The face of one whom she had met only a few weeks before, whose voice, whose smile, had taken her back to the days of her childhood again.

He was a member of her own family, of whom she had heard much, and thought and dreamed far more. His sphere was an active and a useful one—his life so pure, and holy, and unselfish, that its relation served to awaken a deep and dangerous interest within the heart of the woman who had listened to it so eagerly.

Kind and courteous he was to all, and especially to women, and yet he had never loved; brave, yet gentle; reserved, but never haughty; stately and handsome, yet without vanity; and dedicating all—courage, zeal, gentleness, and glorious intellect—to the hazardous profession he had chosen; consecrating himself, as a kind of high-priest, to the Lord, and only caring to follow in His footsteps, and preach His word to the heathen and those who sat in darkness longing for the light. He seemed to her a Christian knight, "without fear and without reproach", and in her heart he was shrined, even in her girlhood, not as an idol, but as her highest and fullest realization of perfect manhood.

And now that she had met him when she was best able to understand and appreciate his worth, he was becoming, by degrees, all in all to her—guide, teacher, companion, and friend—and slowly, but surely, a love was growing up in her heart for him—a love which purified her whole nature and sanctified her life, and which was no more to be compared to the former fancy she had felt, than is the faint glimmer of starlight on a cloudy eve to the full, clear radiance of the queenly moon, that looks, unstained, upon a dark and sinful earth.

The first affection was clogged with the doubts, and jealousies, and sorrows of earth: this wore the calm semblance of a heavenly flame. She did not ask to be his wife; indeed I doubt if at that time she ever dreamed of the thing. She wished to labor with and for him; to sit at his feet and listen humbly to his teachings; to shelter him with an unobtrusive care and devotion through life, and feel, in the hour of death, that his calm eyes were upon her, his voice sounding prayerfully and hopefully in her ear, his hand leading her through the valley of the shadow of death, where grief and terror lay in wait for her soul.

But no man, high and noble though he may be, has it in his nature to love as purely and unselfishly as some women can do; and while Paul Elliott saw that his young relative was faithful and true, he saw also that she was gifted and ardent; and, at least to him, beautiful. He had never loved, because he had never found talent and piety, genius and goodness combined. Now, when he discovered all those necessary qualities in one, and above all, in one who had become so dear to him, and whom, he

feared, he should have loved half some of them been wanting, he saw no reason why he should not secure the treasure for himself. Neither were vowed to celibacy; both, he believed, would be better, happier together than apart; and though he knew nothing of the sentiments she cherished toward him, he preferred to trust to his good fortune, and satisfy himself on that point, rather than to leave the decisive words unspoken, and go from her side and lose her forever.

She knew this well; and sat, on that pleasant morning, awaiting the announcement of his coming—awaiting the interview which was to decide the whole course of future life.

A shadow crossed the sunlight upon the garden-path, as she looked impatiently from the window—a hand was upon the latch, and a step upon the threshold, as she resumed her seat—and some one entered, bringing with him a wandering breeze, freighted with the odor of countless flowers. She rose, and held out her hand with a gentle smile that brought a new and lovely light to her proud face.

But as she slowly raised her eyes to the face of the intruder, that look changed to a glance of astonishment, almost of fear.

"Mr. Oliver!" she gasped.

"The same, at your service," he replied, laughing at her look of utter consternation. "One would imagine I was the Wandering Jew, and brought the plague in my train, to see the way in which people greet me. My wife was kind enough to faint when I entered the breakfast-room, somewhat unexpectedly this morning—on account of the very agreeable surprise, no doubt," he added, with a sarcastic intonation that showed her he knew all.

"When did you arrive?" asked Miss Marchmont, without noticing the sneer.

"By the earliest train this morning. I came on the wings of love, or rather the Dover express, to meet my charming Kitty all the sooner. My charming Kitty, did I say? My charming Penelope rather—who has employed the time of my absence by resolutely keeping all her suitors at bay!"

"I don't like you in that mood, Mr. Oliver. I don't like your face—your voice—nor the manner in which you speak of your wife! Why did you go and leave her in that outrageous way?"

"Come and walk with me, Olive," he said, abruptly, offering his arm. Then, seeing that she hesitated and looked surprised, he added: "Oh, I beg ten thousand pardons, with all my heart! I should have said: Miss Marchmont, will you honor me by taking a stroll with me through your grounds?"

It was absurd to refuse him; and seeing, by a stolen glance at her watch, that there was yet an hour before Paul Elliott could arrive, she took his arm, and they went down the steps and into the sunny garden together. Through the flower-garden he led her, and out upon the lawn, where, veiled from the low shrubbery from all inquiring eyes, stood a gnarled and twisted tree, whose fantastically-carved trunk had often served as a seat for some romantic beauty during the *al fresco* entertainments for which the "Growlery" was justly celebrated. Miss Marchmont sat down there. Mr. Oliver leaned against the branches, looked down at her, and began to talk in that tone of suppressed vehemence which deep passion only knows.

"Why did I leave my wife? You know as well as I do, Miss Marchmont. I thought her a good little thing. I knew that she was pretty; but one gets tired of mutton when it becomes a standing dish."

"Mutton!" said Miss Marchmont, lifting her eyebrows.

"Why not? Is not our charming little friend yonder, a lamb? A lamb in innocence as well as appearance, mind you."

"You have no right to speak of her in that way. You were sarcastic enough and disagreeable enough before you ran away from her: but your short residence in Paris has made you worse instead of better."

"Thanks," he said, bowing as if she had paid him a compliment. "My short residence in Paris seems to have had the same effect upon

my charming wife. Have you not noticed that?"

"No!" was the ungracious reply. "And as people cannot help taking sides in these matters, I must tell you frankly that I hold with your wife in everything—not with you; and that I will not sit quietly and hear her abused!"

"In everything?" he said, with a slight smile "Even in her encouragement of Captain Conyers?"

"Captain Conyers has gone. She has sent him about his business, at all events."

"I know it, and I am very sorry. There is a curious sensation in my mind, when I hear that gallant captain mentioned, which can only be allayed by the gentle exercise of kicking him out of my house. However, for the present, let the gallant captain go. And so you take part against me; you, of all women on earth, Olive?"

She did not answer. Her eyes drooped beneath his piercing questioning gaze.

The years that had passed since they were young together had made little difference in her face or form. She was still graceful and noble looking—the same haughty curve lingered round her lip—the same roguish smile lit up her animated face—and only a close observer could discern that deep down in the proud eyes lay a look of latent weariness, which showed how different was the woman from the girl of sixteen.

"I want to say something to you. May I?" She bowed her head.

A sudden change was visible in his manner. A subdued eagerness and a happy hope flushed his cheek and kindled in his eyes. She looked at him with a kind of calm surprise.

"You ask why I left my wife, and why I speak of her as I did just now. You know, Olive, how utterly unable she is to give me what I require—the heart, the mind, the soul—pshaw! I do not look for these in her. Olive, do you remember the summer we spent together in America years ago?"

She would not tell him how long and faithfully she had remembered it.

"I loved you, then, as a sister," he went on, hurriedly; "for all the tenderness and passion of my nature was sleeping. You began to write; and at last, one of your books came to me; and when I read it, I knew what the lost glory was. It was you and your love that I wanted; and I said to myself—'This is the kindred soul that I need.' They told me that you were gay, wealthy, and heartless. I was afraid to force myself upon your notice after my infamous behavior, and I gave up all hopes of ever meeting you again, except as we met in the fashionable and the literary world. In the New Forest, however, I dreamed a dream of love and happiness once more, but only for a day. You left me just when the words that should have won you were trembling on my tongue—and I married! You have been my friend—the friend of my wife! Will you never be more? Mine is a wasted, a broken life; but you can make it all I ever dreamed or hoped it would be. I cannot part from you again without telling you how well—how madly I love you! Life will be nothing to me without you! Olive, what have you to say?"

Pale and trembling he awaited her answer. But she was silent—sitting with her hand before her eyes. He knelt beside her, and implored.

"Olive, only one word. Do you love another?"

She raised her head, and regarded him with a long, steady look.

"You!" she said, sadly. "You, whom I once loved so tenderly, to come here and insult me like this!"

"I mean no insult."

"You—you of all others! The measure of your weakness, of your ingratitude, of your cowardice, is filled! Farewell, Francis Oliver! Your way lies there—mine here—and I hope that we may never meet again! I would rather—far rather, have seen you lying in your coffin, than fallen—abject and degraded—as you are now."

She turned away as she spoke, and walked

toward the house. And he dared not attempt, by look or word, to detain her.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Farewell my home, my home no longer now.
Witness of many a calm and happy day;
And thou, fair eminence, upon whose brow
Dwells the last sunshine of the evening ray.
Farewell, mine eyes no longer shall pursue
The westering sun beyond this utmost height
When slowly he forsakes the field of light.
No more the freshness of the falling dew
Cool, and delightful, here shall bathe my head,
As from this western window, dear, I lean,
Listening the while I watch the placid scene—
The martins twittering underneath the shed.
Farewell my home, where many a day has past,
In joys whose loved remembrance long shall last."
—SOUTHEY.

Was Mr. Oliver mad?

It would almost seem so; but there are times in a life like his when sanity puts on the aspect of insanity, and plays the most fantastic tricks imaginable. One of these wild moods had come upon him, and he had yielded to it, as we have seen.

Those who have lived such lives are, I think, to be judged more leniently than those with whom the current of existence has glided on with a placid and unbroken flow. Mr. Oliver had exhausted most pleasures in his youth, and when Kitty first dawned upon his sight, he was a lonely and a disappointed man. Some solace he found at first in her fresh young love for a life wasted, for high gifts thrown away: but, alas! the voice of that charmer could not always soothe him. When the first fervor of passion had passed away, and he found nothing except beauty and good-temper in his wife (because he would not look for more), how the tie of marriage wearied him—how eagerly he turned to anything, everything that would give him one new sensation more! He ought to have studied Kitty more deeply, it is true—he ought to have watched and encouraged her first dim perceptions of the beautiful—her first faint reachings after the true; but he had not patience to do this. Authors, I think, are generally impatient with those who do not meet them at once upon their own ground. They will not take pains to hold out a helping hand, that they may reach it; at least, if they take such pains with strangers, they will not (owing, I suppose to the utter perversity of human nature) with those who are nearest and dearest to them. Had Kitty been a pretty young lady "in society," whose favor Mr. Oliver wished to win, it is more than probable that he would have found ways and means of improving her mind; but she had been a peasant maid before she was his wife. Where would be the use of angling after a speckled trout that is already fast upon the hook?

So, finding her no companion for his more thoughtful hours, and taking no pains to make her so, Mr. Oliver, having had leisure during his Parisian exile to repent of his momentary infatuation for La Stella, returned to the thought of his first love with fond and remorseful tenderness.

The breaking up of such a friendship is no light thing, and it is no wonder that the world had grown dark and cold. Once she had lightened all his trouble by sharing it, and when he missed her he groped blindly on his way, as if the light of his existence had gone out. She was the only one who stood between him and the world. He had but her, and when all sweet ties were rent in that one which bound them together, he stood face to face with all antagonists, unarmed and unshielded. He tried to supply her place—not so much because he was inconstant, as because he loathed his loneliness. In every instance he failed. Those whom he sought had other ties and friends—at best, he could only occupy a second place in their hearts. What was more important, was this: they were of the common order of women. Their souls were narrow, their brains capable of supporting only one trivial set of ideas. Probably he wearied them; certainly, they wearied him most unbearably.

Olive's was a queenly soul, that fed upon high thoughts. And constant associations with such a spirit, had spoiled him for others. So it came to pass that he still went his way alone, and in the Valley of Humiliation, or on the Mountain

of Peace, his cry was always: "Will she ever come back to me?"

And then he met her once again, and saw her day after day, still young and ardent, yet already rich and famous—the star of many an assembly—a woman whose name was upon every tongue, and whose written words, no less than her spoken ones, influenced many a reader, charmed and brightened many a life. And while she was going steadily on in her upward course, his wife was flirting with Captain Conyers—giving to him the heart she had vowed away at the altar, and doing her best to make a laughing-stock and byword of her husband's name! It was not a pleasant contrast. And forgetting all his share of the blame (no man ever remembers, or is even conscious of that), he brooded over the picture till all the disappointment, the despondency, the hopelessness of his life, overflowed in that one interview with Miss Marchmont, and made her a stranger to him forever.

He watched her, as she left him that morning, till she entered the house and closed the door behind her. All was over. His self-love wounded, his pride hurt, his dearest hopes disappointed, her friendship lost, his life a blank!

"A pleasing prospect before me!" he broke out, with a bitter laugh. "Oh, I wish—I wish, with all my heart that I was lying comfortably under six feet of earth—all this ceaseless worry and vexation over—nothing to do but to sleep sweetly and take my rest. Death—kind death!—when will you come?"

As those sad words fell from his weary heart, as well as from his lips, did nothing speak to him, from the flowers at his feet, from the softly-waving trees, from the deep blue sky, of another world, whose beauty shall far exceed the beauty of this, and whose happiness, for those who win to it, can never be described! No! Pagan that he was, he asked nothing more—believed in nothing more than rest! To lie beneath those whispering trees; to "feel the daisies growing over him;" to know that sunshine and shadow were above, and the little singing-birds, and the small, yet lovely creatures of the earth around him; to blend his dust with theirs, and to carry on the vast beneficent plan of Nature. This was all he wanted—this was what would have been a blessed boon to him upon that very day.

He roused himself from the pleasing yet melancholy dream at last, and shrugged his shoulders.

"That happy hour has not come for me," he muttered; "and as there is nothing but vexation for me till it does come, I'll even go on in the old way. I'll go and have it out with Kitty."

He strode away, never looking to the right or the left, till he reached his own house. Kitty was not in the library, which had of late been her usual place of resort. She was in her own morning-room, and there he sought her, at last. She was sitting in the window-seat, reading in a volume of poems, the legend of "Burd Helen."

"Lord John he rode, Burd Helen ran,
A live-lang simmer's day,
Until they cam' to Clyde water,
Was filled frae bank to brae.

"Seest thou yon water, Helen," said he,
"That flows from bank to brim?"
"I trust to God, Lord John," she said,
"You ne'er will see me swim."

As she finished the lines, her husband entered, and, without seeing her at first, stood close beside the window, looking out upon the lawn

The heavy folds of the curtain in his hand drooped down with a friendly shadow over her, and she had time to take a stealthy survey of him. Tall, stately, and handsome, he stood, his fine face turned upward, his large, dark eyes softening in the warm light of the noon-day. He looked touched and pensive; was this the face her fancy had pictured while she read his letter. He looked like a poet—like a patriot; but never like a false, unscrupulous man.

Turning away with a deep sigh, he suddenly caught sight of her. His face changed—the pensive look gave way to a smile of scorn.

"Oh, you are here!" he exclaimed. "I have been in search of you for some time. I really

began to think you had gone away with your friend, Captain Conyers!"

If there had been any chance of a reconciliation between them (and who can say what reviving thoughts of tenderness might not have been in Kitty's heart during that steady gaze?) it was lost now, and forever. She sprung from her seat, and dashed the book she was reading to the floor.

"Mr. Oliver," she cried, "how dare you say such things to me? You have yet to learn, I think, who you are speaking to."

She was going out of the room when he stopped her, pale with passion.

"Explain yourself."

"Let your own heart tell you what I mean."

"Do you doubt my honor?"

She was silent for a moment. Then she said, passionately:

"Doubt you? I do more—far more than that! I hate you! I have the most utter contempt for you—a contempt which no words can possibly express!"

"Indeed!"

"Yes! and I have longed to tell you so ever since you wrote to me from Paris."

"Where I had been kindly informed, Kitty, that you were making me and yourself the laughing-stock of London."

"I don't care—I don't care what they said!" she cried defiantly, for his mocking smile made her utterly beside herself with rage. "I wish it had all been true, every word of it. And as sure as I live, Mr. Oliver, I will leave you this very day, and never see you, I hope, on earth again."

"You are complimentary, madam," was all he said, as she sprung toward the door, trembling with passion from head to foot.

He opened it with a low bow, closed it after her, and sat down and laughed. He had "had it out" with Kitty much sooner than he thought.

That vow of Kitty's was rashly made, it may be, but it was faithfully kept. That very afternoon, while Mr. Oliver was in London, renewing acquaintance with some of his old club friends, she dressed herself for a walk, went quietly out of the house and down the garden-walk. Her own maid and several of the other servants saw her go; but though she was as pale as death, and carried a light traveling-sachet in her hand, not one among them dreamed that they would never look upon her face again!

At the gate she paused for a moment, and turned back toward the house with yearning eyes, as if half-wavering in her purpose. The bitterness of death was in that look! How much—oh, how much she had said farewell to forever as she closed that gate behind her for the last time!

CHAPTER XXV.

"Our babe in its quiet sleep
Lay shrouded as soft as balm,
And the children came to peep
At its beauty, marily calm;
'Twas touched with diviner grace
Than when it had lived and smiled.
* * * * *

"O'er its beauty infantile
A nimbus of glory fell—
There lingered a rosebud smile,
A beautiful, peaceful spell;
The fingers of Nature wove
Its ringlets, which clustered free,
And pure was its breast of love,
As the wild young swan's may be."
—SHELDON CHADWICK.

Five long years passed slowly away. To some they brought new life and pleasure—to others, sorrow, suffering, and death. To Kitty Oliver they only gave a heritage of care and concealed grief—a furrow on her open brow, and a silvery hair or two in the brown locks that were now smoothly banded away from her face, instead of hanging in the wild luxuriance to which she had accustomed them in her earlier years.

And this was only an outward token of the inward change. Never were there two more different beings than the girl of eighteen and the woman of twenty-three. Grave and stately, with a look of melancholy yearning and inward pain in her proud, dark eyes, Kitty moved about her home like one in a dream. She had left England without seeing Miss Marchmont or

Mr. Oliver again, and had accompanied La Stella, after her marriage, to New York. But that marriage, to which the singer had looked forward with much calm pleasure, had proved, like Kitty's, a most unhappy one.

The young husband, who had been so devoted a lover, grew capricious and unkind, treated her with coldness and neglect, and finally left her entirely in company with another woman.

In a little more than a year, her child was born. She named her Agnes, and she became the idol of the whole house, and her mother's life was bound up in her—she only breathed and moved for her.

When idols like this are made, they are often taken away; but hers was spared—at least, for a time.

Her child was her world, and she looked upon it and saw that it was fair.

That child was taken suddenly from her by treachery and stealth—taken from her home, with all its pure and innocent associations, and given to its father and his abandoned companions. Before she could follow upon their track—in the zenith of her power, and glory, and beauty—she was suddenly stricken down. A terrible visitation was hanging over the devoted city of New York, and she was one of the first to fall a victim to the malady.

Nothing remained but to end her days in peaceful obscurity. The hollow cough that shook her wasted frame, and the cold dew that moistened her lip and forehead at the slightest exertion, showed that they would be but few.

When she was pronounced strong enough to bear the journey, she set out at once, accompanied only by a single servant and Kitty, and without again having one of the gay throng who would have worshiped at her chariot-wheels. With a sigh, she looked her last at New York, remembering how her childish hopes and wishes had turned thither, and how they had met with their fulfillment. She sunk back in the carriage as the dome of the City Hall faded from her view, and thought of those whom she could never meet again; and Kitty, faithful little friend, loved, and soothed, and pitied her as best she might.

How strange a contrast there seemed between those two women! The one fair-haired and soft-eyed, with a meek and quiet face, on whose features contentment and home-happiness should have been most plainly stamped; the other, dark, and proud and self-sustained, with a look that said to the most careless observer: "Oh, I have suffered!" To one, life ought to have been a fair summer's day, with only now and then a light and happy cloud; to the other—ah, what to her?—but a bleak and stormy winter, where everything she loved lay down, and shivered and died. And yet their destinies, their trials, had been almost precisely the same at the last.

At the "Westwood Farm," in Illinois, they made their home—welcome and honored guests. Six months passed happily away, when Kitty, standing one morning in the farmhouse-door, heard voices—men's voices—in the garden below, exchanging a careless adieu. She leaned eagerly forward, and saw a tall, fine-looking gentleman talking to the farmer's eldest son:

"Well, good-by for the present."

"Good-by."

They started down to the gate together, still smoking their cigars; and Kitty stood gazing after them, her hands clasped tightly over her beating heart; a wild look of disbelief, and doubt, and bewilderment upon her beautiful face.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"We sang our song together,
Till the stars shook in the skies—
We spoke—we spoke of common things,
Yet tears were in our eyes.
And her hand—I knew it trembled,
To the light, warm clasp of mine—
Still we were friends—but only friends—
My sweet friend, Leoline!"

Strange, as that sudden meeting and half-recognition was, another quite as strange had taken place only a few hours before in a far-off Eastern land.

It was a day and a scene never to be forgotten. A party of Europeans were crossing the

hill in an open ferry-boat, in company with Arabs, Egyptians, Turks, Greeks, donkeys, and donkeys' boys, almost without number; while their own peculiar circle consisted of two Americans, two Englishmen, a French lady, a German lady and her maid, an Arab Sheik, a Greek dragoman, and the Russian prince, who was for the time being at his mercy, a Spanish don, and two young gentlemen from the Emerald Isle, whose handsome faces and slight mellow brogue were delightful alike to the eye and the ear.

It was a strange mixture of races, countries, and languages, in so small a space; but every one took kindly to the situation, and chatted away as if they had known each other for a lifetime, instead of half an hour. The whole expedition, so far, had been one series of blunders and mistakes. The donkeys, provided by the English lady for herself and friends, had been sent into Cairo the preceding night, in charge of an Arab servant, who chose to overlook the regulation which forces every one to carry a small paper lantern through the city streets after eight, P.M. Consequently, Mustapha and his donkeys were safely ensconced in the guard-house for the day, and the ladies were forced to content themselves with the animals recruited by Zeld, the dragoman, from the public stands. Then, a portion of the party, tired of waiting while these arrangements were being carried out, had started in advance, and would probably be heard of no more that day. They had carried off part of the provisions and all the wine—they had taken a different route from the rest; and last, but not least, they had enticed away a third American, on whose calm good sense and even temper all had relied, in case the Northerner and Southerner, who still remained with them, came to grief over the discussion of the merits of the "peculiar institution."

For all these mishaps, however, there was no remedy; and, accordingly, they made themselves merry over them, till the grave-eyed Orientals around looked up in wonder at the confusion of tongues and the hearty bursts of laughter proceeding from the end of the boat where the "Christians" were congregated. Slowly the clumsy vessel made its way across the beautiful Nile, while the rowers sung their monotonous chant, and stared placidly at the banks they had left behind them. At last they landed; and after twenty minutes of indescribable noise and confusion, found themselves clear of the Arab village, and trotting swiftly along upon donkeys toward their goal of hope—the Pyramids. One lady fell behind as they forded a small stream, about an hour later, and watched the picturesque procession winding up the steep banks and disappearing beneath the palm-trees just beyond. First rode the two Arab guides, dressed in white, with heavy guns slung behind their backs; then the two Englishmen, then the Northern lady mounted on a donkey that bore the appropriate name of "Yankee Doodle," and had a decided *penchant* for taking her into all the bogs, and across all the unsafe places on the way. By this lady's side, the watcher saw, with some surprise, the Southern captain. Apparently no interference between them was necessary—they were chatting together as amiably as if slavery and abolitionism had never existed. Behind this pair rode the French lady and the Russian prince, followed by the German lady and her maid, escorted by the two young Irishmen. The donkey-boys and dragomen brought up the rear. As they went slowly on, in Indian file, the lady saw a rider crossing the desert at full speed, on a splendid black Arabian horse. He gazed somewhat curiously at the motley cavalcade passing by; but when he caught sight of her face, he reined up with a sudden exclamation of surprise, and held out his hand.

"How long is it since you left England?" he said. "Where have you been all these years?"

"In Italy."

"Alone?"

Her color rose.

"No. With my husband, Paul Elliott!"

"The missionary!" he said, staring at her in wildest surprise. "You have married him?"

"Yes; and have accompanied him here for the work he has to do."

He looked very much as if he was going to whistle, but checked himself in time.

"Is he with you, to-day?"

"No, he is at Cairo."

"And are you happy?"

"Very. Are you?"

"Oh, of course!" he said, bitterly. "A nameless, homeless wretch, without a soul on earth to care if he lives or dies, must be very happy—don't you think so?"

"Get Kitty back again, then; and be kinder to her than you used to be!"

He stared.

"Why—is it possible you do not know? There has been a divorce!"

"Who procured it?"

"I did. I got it before Captain Conyers died in India."

"Then, God forgive you, Francis Oliver! You have been the evil genius of that poor child's life; but this last cruelty crowns all. Let us say good-by, at once!"

"As you like."

But, even while he spoke the words, something swelled in his throat, and his eyes filled with tears.

"You ought not to be so harsh with me," he murmured. "However, good-by, since you will have it so, and may you be happy. Shake hands once more!"

She gave him her hand. He bent over it an instant, then touched his horse with his spur, and was off like the wind toward the Pyramids. Straight on in the wide desert he rode, and so vanished from her eyes. In the land of his adoption he lived and died, but Olive Elliott never saw him on earth again!

CHAPTER XXVII.

"There's a blue flower in my garden,
The bee loves more than all—
The bee and I, we love it both,
Though it is but frail and small.

"She loved it too—long, long ago—
Her love was less than mine;
Still we were friends—but only friends—
My lost love, Leoline!"

Kitty, going back into the farm-house in a state of utter bewilderment, met good Mrs. Westwood, with her hands full of magnificent hot-house flowers.

"Oh, there you are!" she exclaimed, as she caught sight of her young lodger. "I was so afraid you had gone out. And here are some splendid flowers, that Judge Hill brought for the sick lady from his own conservatory."

"Judge who?" said Kitty, as she took the brilliant bouquet and hid her face in it, lest the old lady should see the equally-brilliant blush that rose suddenly in her cheeks.

"Judge Hill, of Hilltown—a great friend of my son John's. Such a house as he has got, my dear! Such horses, such carriages! He is an Englishman, you know."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; and when he came to America, he was as poor as Job's turkey, they say. But everything has prospered with him since he settled out West. He is a naturalized American citizen, you see, and as smart a man as you will find anywhere. He has been a selectman, and member for Congress, and now he is a judge, and Hilltown is named after him. You must let my John drive you over there some day; for his place is really worth seeing."

"Mrs. Hill might not like that," suggested Kitty, in a low voice.

"Law bless you! he isn't married. That is the worst of him. He won't marry. We always have a quarrel about it when he comes here. As I tell him, an old bachelor is of no sort of use in this world; but he only laughs. So kind is he to women, too! The minute he heard we had a sick lady here, he brought these flowers all the way himself—twelve good miles, if it is a step."

"He is indeed very kind," said Kitty. "Pray, say how much we are obliged to him, the next time he comes here."

"That I will!" And the good old woman hustled away to look after her household affairs.

Kitty mused a moment, then went straight to La Stella, gave her the flowers, and told her all. Whereupon La Stella, wayward as invalids usually are, bestirred herself to obtain more information about the young judge, and ascertaining, without a doubt, that he was about to pay a short visit to the city of New York, she immediately insisted on returning there—dragged Kitty in her train, and entered upon a round of fashionable dissipation, which had but one acknowledged end, that of bringing the long-parted friends together once again.

They met first at a party in a Fifth Avenue hotel, given in honor of the English consul.

Kitty, the brilliant, dark-eyed woman, with a certain Spanish ease and coquetry visible in her manner, was the acknowledged belle of the room. Young men and old men, bowed alike at her shrine, and gazed enraptured on the perfect loveliness of her face. All save one—and he stood aloof, at a little distance, with his head bowed moodily, and his arms crossed upon his breast. With a kind of startled interest he mingled with the select few who were following her to the music-room. A friend came up and took his arm.

"It will be such a treat," he whispered. "She seldom sings, but to-night she was obliged to yield. I am so glad."

He did not answer. He was watching the superb air of indifference with which she received the attention of those who thronged around her.

"What shall I sing?" she asked indifferently.

"Oh, let it be one of your beautiful Scotch ballads," said a lady who stood beside her.

She paused, played a simple prelude, and began to sing "Bonny Doon."

The listener started and turned pale. He had often heard that same song among the groves of New Forest, and though the deep contralto voice was wonderfully strengthened and purified, he felt that it must be the same. Dazzled and bewildered, he passed his hand over his eyes, and tried to think.

How she had changed! How proud and queenly she looked—and how well her costly dress became her! He gazed at her with his soul in his eyes. As she sung the touching words—

"And my fause lover pu'd the rose,
But oh, he left the thorn with me!" with the sound of tears in her voice, she looked up, and there beside her stood the one whose memory seemed inseparably connected with the song, and of whom she was even then thinking! The shock was too great and sudden. She sprung up, laid both her hands in his, and then, for the first time in her life, she fainted!

All was confusion around her; but it was Judge Hill who bore her to a couch near the window.

"Give her air!" he said, loudly, and they obeyed, while one or two, who had remained to assist him, hurried away for remedies. The two so long parted were alone.

She opened her heavy eyes, and saw him bending over her, pale as death.

"You here! Do we meet again like this, William?" she exclaimed.

After the first sudden shock, however, she bore the meeting well, for she had been schooling herself for it long. Not so the judge. His voice faltered—his cheek paled as he touched her hand, and a deep flush rose to his very temples. With a graceful ease she covered his embarrassment, and, dismissing the group of friends around her one by one, fanned herself languidly while she chatted, first to him, and then to La Stella, who still remained. But William was too anxious and ill at ease to join the conversation, and at last she took pity on him.

"The heat of the room is still so great," she murmured, "if you will give me your arm, we will explore some of the cool marble halls and passages for which this house is so famous. Anything is better than these crowded saloons."

"Dear Kitty, forgive me," he said. "But when I saw you so unhappy, I could not go away or be silent. You know—you must know—that I love you with all my heart and soul."

I would sooner die than see a shadow or a cloud upon your face."

A look of bitter pain passed over it even as he was speaking; for she remembered that he had said the same thing to her, long before, in the garden by the New Forest.

"I am sorry to hear you say this," she answered, rather unsteadily.

"I have always felt that you were wronged," he went on, eagerly. "I have heard something about you—not much—but enough to make me love you more, and to long with all my heart for the happiness of calling you my wife."

"Ah," she said, shaking her head, "I have had many a thought of you, William, since I knew we were to meet. We have both grown old. So ends this little story of love for me. For the rest, I try to be useful and busy, and fill up my appointed time as best I may. It is a pleasanter life, too, than I once thought it could be. It is not the life that might have been; but God knows what is best. I look back upon my early life in the New Forest, and that troubled ecstasy of love as a beautiful dream, which was given me at morning, that I might better support the toils and trials of life's noonday. But the noonday is going now, and the night is coming on. I look forward to nothing but rest. I have waited to tell you this, William—to thank you for all your goodness and kindness—to say 'farewell. God bless you!' I am glad you are a good and noble man; because one day, if not now, I am sure, you will be a very happy one."

"One light pressure on his hand, and she glided away like a ghost."

He did not attempt to detain her. He left the house and sought his own rooms at the Hotel.

Throwing a few things into a valise, he stepped out into the street, and walked slowly up toward the hotel where the ball had been given. He found himself there, after a hurried walk of some five minutes.

"It is the last time, Kitty, that I shall be so weak," he murmured, as he looked up at the brilliantly lighted windows. "The last time I shall be so near you! Oh Kitty, can you dream what you have done, or is your heart all marble!"

He buried his face in his hands and wept like a child. The memory of the happy hours he had spent with her, came over him too strongly to be borne. He could only meet such remembrances with his tears.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"Break, break, break,
On thy cold gray stones, oh sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me!"

"Oh, well for the fisherman's boy,
That he shouts with his sister at play;
And well for the sailor lad,
That he sings in his boat on the bay."

—TENNYSON.

In the guest-chamber at the Westwood Farm Kitty Oliver lay dying! Consumption, that fatal scourge of the Northern climate, had already numbered La Stella among its victims, and was but waiting now, in a few hours, to claim another as his prey.

Kitty knew well that all was over—knew that the fair green earth had nothing more in store for her. Yet she was very calm—busying herself in penning little, trembling words of farewell to her father, Miss Marchmont, and the husband whose face she was never to see again. When the letters were finished, she lay back upon her pillow with a placid smile.

"And this is death!" she said, musingly. "After this sad mistake of life, comes the sweet and long repose! I do not fear it."

A sob from the watcher by her side checked the words. She put out her hand gently.

"Poor William! First to love, and last to desert me! I knew that you would come when I sent for you. And I shall die happier for having you here. There is something sweet to me in the thought of passing my last hours with you. I began life by your side alone, let me also end it here."

He could not speak. He laid his head down upon her hand, and cried bitterly.

"Do you remember," she said, dreamily, "the old fairy tale we used to read together? How I should like to hear it once again."

"I can remember it, Kitty."

"Tell it to me, then."

With a trembling voice, broken by sobs, he began the dear familiar tale.

She checked him in the middle of it, saying:

"Oh, I wish we had staid in the New Forest all our lives, dear, reading fairy tales! I have been so tired all these years; I am so tired now!"

She closed her eyes with a weary sigh, and seemed to doze. Then a strange change passed over her face, she opened her eyes, and looked with questioning fear at him.

"After all, I dread it! It is dark and cold! I feel so faint! I am afraid to die! I don't know how to die."

"But we have read in the Bible, my darling—"

"I know. God be merciful to me—a sinner."

They were her last words. She folded her hands upon her breast, looking up to heaven, and died!

William bent over her in speechless agony a moment. Then, rising from his knees, he closed the sightless eyes, kissed the cold lips, covered the poor, pale face, and went away, weeping bitterly.

The fairy tale was never finished. But better words and a sweeter song were on her lips, we trust, in Heaven!

The tale is told, dear reader! If you ask me why I have painted the sad picture of their separated, aimless, and, in some sense, wasted lives, I cannot answer you. What one sees, that must one reproduce.

The silence of the grave hallows all things. And standing by that lonely mound upon the western prairie, it may be that each one of us can forgive poor Kitty for her faults and follies—can judge her mercifully—and looking at the secret records of our own lives, feel pity and sorrow for this useless broken one of hers! So gentle may we all be judged in turn, when we, too, sleep the sleep that knows no waking.

THE END.

Half-Dime Singer's Library

- 1 WHOA, EMMA! and 59 other Songs.
- 2 CAPTAIN CUFF and 57 other Songs.
- 3 THE GAINSBORO' HAT and 62 other Songs.
- 4 JOHNNY MORGAN and 60 other Songs.
- 5 I'LL STRIKE YOU WITH A FEATHER and 62 others.
- 6 GEORGE THE CHARMER and 56 other Songs.
- 7 THE BELLE OF ROCKAWAY and 52 other Songs.
- 8 YOUNG FELLAH, YOU'RE TOO FRESH and 60 others.
- 9 SHY YOUNG GIRL and 65 other Songs.
- 10 I'M THE GOVERNOR'S ONLY SON and 58 other Songs.
- 11 MY FAN and 65 other Songs.
- 12 COMIN' THRO' THE RYE and 55 other Songs.
- 13 THE ROLICKING IRISHMAN and 59 other Songs.
- 14 OLD DOG TRAY and 62 other Songs.
- 15 WHOA, CHARLIE and 59 other Songs.
- 16 IN THIS WHEAT BY AND BY and 62 other Songs.
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